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ON LONELY SHORES.

ON LONELY SHORES

AND OTHER RHYMES

BY

JAMES LEIGH JOYNES



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TO MY DEAR
MABEL MARIAN TURNER
I DEDICATE THESE RHYMES.

830240

TO MY BOOK.

GO forth alone and face the fearsome folk
Whose knife makes sharp their murder-dealing pen ;
Bare thy poor pages to the damning stroke
And death-fraught doom of those remorseless men.
And if thou 'scap'st alive out of their den,
Come back to me, and I will heal the scars
Thou get'st upon thee in these dangerous wars.

For one will say, " These are but stolen wares ;
What meaner stealing than this thief's may be ?
Now red shame burn his shameless soul that dares
To ape the moods of might'ier men than he,
To match old rhymes to the unsounded sea,
To prate of knights and ladies, and to deem
His voice may echo to the mountain stream.

" Have we not many a voice of ampler sound,
And many a sweeter note than this man's song ?
Shall loud intruders tread the sacred ground,
And thrust their harsh discordant noise among
Those singing voices we have loved so long ?
Nay, take him by the throat, and plunge him down
Deep beneath Time's dark river till he drown."

Yet care not thou what such-like folk may say.
Have not I said it to thee oft before ?
Needs must thou faint upon the long, long way
That leads at last unto the deathless shore,
Where mighty poets dwell for evermore ;
Needs must thou faint upon the way, and lie
Where no man cares to wait to see thee die.

Then to thee lying dead there shall not come
One sorrowing friend to weep upon thy dust ;
O'er thy dumb pages still shall Fame be dumb,
And all thy songlets given to her trust
She shall resign to moth and mould and rust,
And sore o'ertasked shall put at last away
The charge she took yet cannot but bewray.

For this shall be the doom of thee, to lie
Long, long a-dying, and to hear the tread
Of all thy strong-souled fellows pass thee by,
And see the garland crown each eager head,
And get thee to the chambers of the dead,
And lay thee on thy bed of slow decay,
Too deeply damned to dread the judgment day.

CONTENTS.

	PAGE
ON LONELY SHORES	1
WAGE OF LOVE	15
DANGER	39
THE STREAM	40
QUESTIONS	45
TWAIN	47
REQUIESCAT	48
GOOD MORNING	52
GOOD NIGHT	53
IMPATIENCE	54
LOVE'S DAWN	56
PARTING	58
ALONE	60
LOVE'S CURRENT COIN	63
REVENGE	64
THE ORCHARD	66
SHOOTING STARS	67
NIGHT	68
SIMILIA SIMILIBUS	69
FAREWELL	70
DOUBTS	72
LOVE'S REASON	76
AN APPEAL	77

	PAGE
MEETING	79
MABELLE	80
AGAIN.	82
CONTENT	85
TO THE OWL	87
HAPPINESS	89
THE WITCHES' TRYST	90
FAILURE	94
THE FINDING OF THE BELLE MAY	97
THE LANDSCAPE PAINTER.	113

ON LONELY SHORES.

WHERE no mariner looks for a landing,
No bird seeks shelter of tree,
A fort on the cliffs is standing
That frown on the Westward sea.
Its walls are as wrought steel targes
Resisting assault to the death :
But its heights when the hurricane charges,
Can scarce draw breath.

Those heights by vague memories haunted
Still stand as they stood from of old,
Unabashed, undefeated, undaunted
By thunder or tempest or cold.
Time's hand must deface and deform us,
As year upon year drifts by,
But its bastions bold and enormous
Still front the wide sky.

Over-arching, with hurricane pregnant,
Like a vault do the wide skies stand,
The fort, like a throned queen regnant,
Looks over the limitless land.

'Neath the void of the vault and its vastness
It dreads not the wild wind's shock,
For firm are the feet of the fastness
Deep-rooted in rock.

When in tempest its banner is streaming,
And fierce is the hurricane's stress,
And the storm and the thunder are scheming
Its pride to the dust to depress,
And the hosts of the hailstorm assemble
Deep scars on its sides to imprint,
It sets, though the hills are a-tremble,
Its face like a flint.

Though the trees by the storm be uprooted
And whirled at the wild wind's beck,
And the shores of the sea strange-fruited
With fruitage of waif and of wreck ;
Though back be the tide-streams driven,
And backward the vast waves curled,
Not a stone from its stand has been riven,
From its hold has been hurled.

Yet when day has gone down in its splendour,
And sunset in glory has died,
Does the fort make majestic surrender
Of the might that it claimed in its pride.
How sternly soe'er in its starkness
It stands against storm, yet it knows
In the lull betwixt daylight and darkness
A sense of repose.

Then bright in the gloaming a maiden
Is seen on its terrace, whose form
Seems a flower with its sweetness o'erladen,
Over-fragile to front life's storm ;
And late when the glowworm glistens,
And stars are a-sparkle above,
In fear and in rapture she listens
To whispers of love.

O whence did that vision of glory
Like a spirit supernal alight
On the heights that grow haggard and hoary
And weird in the slant moon's sight ?
Those heights, if they listed, could tell us
From whence that fair vision hath come ;
But the fort for its secret is jealous,
Its battlements dumb.

For hither unhelped, unbefriended,
In a cradle unguarded, unsafe,
By nought but the wild winds tended,
Was drifted a wave-borne waif.
'Mid wreckage of storm-torn splinters
Since first was that sweet waif seen,
Seventeen is the tale of the winters,
The springs seventeen.

And now 'neath the battlements, brightly
Lit up by the slow slant moon,
She glides o'er the terraces nightly
To list to the nightingale's tune :

To list to the nightingale's dirges
For a love that is over and done,
And to look for a lover who urges
Love yet to be won.

And nightly the wide waves over,
With effort of arm and of oar,
One who rows like a strong sea-rover
Is borne on his bark to the shore.
And nightly with love's sweet suasion
He prays her to brighten his home,
To dally no more with occasion,
But flee o'er the foam.

For the breath of the breeze is indulgent,
And scarcely astir is the sea,
And its moon-litten waves are refulgent,
Whereo'er she may 'scape and be free :
Yet strong is the strain that must sever
The tie that his suasion withstands,
Ere her home she relinquish for ever
For alien lands.

And daily in wonderful fashion,
As she strays in her garden about,
Is her heart in its strong sweet passion
Torn this way and that way by doubt.
And daily the paths of her pleasance
And the branches that shade it above,
Grow aware of the mystical presence
Of passionate love.

And still in its rose-covered alleys
 She lists to the stir of the breeze,
As daily it dances and dallies
 With shine of the shimmering seas ;
And the kind sea glistens and glances,
 With surges full softly a-swell,
Till the soul of the silence entrances
 Her soul in its spell.

There is wrought strange change by the summer
 In the frown of the fortress above,
By the might of the bright new-comer,
 The tyrant and sorcerer Love.
By the mystical might of the wizard
 Transfigured are turret and hall,
From the world-old wall to the lizard
 That creeps on the wall.

And softer and gentler and kinder
 The smile that enlightens its form,
And effaces each trace and reminder
 Of the frown that affronted the storm ;
Of the frown that affronted the thunder
 And tempest of earlier days—
It is Love that hath wrought this wonder ;
 To Love be the praise.

For buttress and cope weather-blunted
 Are bright with a kindlier sheen,
And its dwarf shrubs wizened and stunted
 Put on them a garment of green ;

A garment of green that effaces
The scars in its iron-bound mail,
And right carefully covers the traces
Deep-scored by the hail.

Full slowly the year grows older,
As each moon waxes and wanes ;
And darker the daytime and colder,
When Autumn is drowned in her rains.
And still does that fair maid ponder
On what will the fates decree,
And shall she, or shall she not wander
Adrift on the sea.

And daily, as Autumn grows later,
And more of the sun must she miss,
She looks on the years that await her,
And dark is her future's abyss.
And daily her love waxes urgent
To bear her away for his bride ;
And her heart, like a traitor insurgent,
Still fights on his side.

Though deeper the shade on the dial,
And darker the gloom of the night,
He laughs at delay and denial,
And calms with his courage her fright.
And slowly his ceaseless insistence,
That knows not refusal or rest,
Is sapping the might for resistance
That once she possessed.

And more is her mind growing sterile
Of reasons his prayer to deny,
Though their path be encompassed with peril,
Where'er o'er the foam they may fly ;
And less doth she deem of the danger
That hangs o'er the unknown ways ;
And ever her home seems stranger,
And darker her days.

And little she dreads wild weather,
And scarce at the swallowing wave
She shudders, if only together
The sea and the storm they may brave.
And high is her courage, if only
His hand on her fingers be laid ;
For she learns at the touch that less lonely
Her lot may be made.

But at last there is spoken a sentence
That scares her reluctance away ;
And straight she has done with repentance
And doubt and despair and delay.
Yea, to-night she will haply discover
The deeps of her tremulous heart,
For her purpose is fixed with her lover
Far hence to depart.

She has learned that there comes on the morrow
To the castle a-wooing a knight ;
And the wings of the dove would she borrow,
Could they but avail her for flight.

For the Lord of the land with derision
And scorn has rejected her prayer
For a space to defer his decision,
For a season forbear.

And loud in his wrath has he spoken,
“ Ere set of the next day’s sun,
A promise that shall not be broken,
A deed that may ne’er be undone,
Shall be ratified here in my hearing,
With seal of my sanction made sure ;
And thy troth, as the heavens ensphering
This earth, shall endure.”

Full lightly his doom has he uttered,
Full carelessly turned him away ;
And the plumes of his pride are unflattered
By doubt if the maid will obey.
But she, “ Since he knows not relenting,
O’er the surge of the sundering sea,
At last to my true-love consenting,
This night will I flee.”

Her pulses with fever are shaken,
Strange mist doth her vision involve ;
She is strong, for her soul hath partaken
Of the wine of a fearless resolve.
But the sense of its secret abashes
Her spirit with shame’s sad guise ;
And deep in their curtaining lashes
Thick-screened are her eyes.

And the quick blood momentarily flushes,
 Bedimming her star-clear sight,
Till she hides in her hands her blushes,
 And weeps in her own despite.
For her thoughts far-truant are roaming,
 And she longs sitting sole in her room
For the day to be quenched in the gloaming,
 The gloaming in gloom.

As the gradual day grows older,
 There gathers a gloom in the air ;
For denser the clouds are and colder,
 And dark as the face of despair.
And the phalanx of vapour advances,
 And will not dissolve or depart ;
Till the frown in the heavens enhances
 The fear in her heart.

For the wind like a ghost is keening,
 And wild with a wail is its moan ;
And the tempest, like tyrant o'erweening,
 Has silenced all sound but its own.
Very loud is its voice in November,
 As under the dun sky's arch
The storm seems again to remember
 Its madness of March.

Yet again comes the sunset revealing
 Its rapture of flame o'er the foam,
Till its splendour on casement and ceiling
 Encrimson the halls of her home ;

The home where a waif she was stranded,
Wind-wafted, a fairy-like form ;
And the walls storm-battered and branded
With bolts of the storm.

And lo, yet again there is wafted
A bark o'er the shifting floor,
Though the quivers of storm sure-shafted
Are weighted with weapons of war ;
And louder the hiss of its arrows,
That sing through the foam in their flight,
As the glow of the sunset narrows,
And dies into night.

And now from her turret descending
She glides like a ghost on the stair,
While the scream of the tempest is rending
The vast dim vault of the air.
Foul softly her footfall is shifted,
In fear by her folk to be heard,
If a latch be ungently uplifted,
An echo upstirred.

Unheeded she passes the portal,
Like a ghost at its sentence of doom,
Or a spirit of splendour immortal
Cast out into uttermost gloom—
To darkness and dungeon ejected
By doom of unrighteous decree—
No light in her eyes is reflected,
No gleam on the sea.

Yet ne'er for her fear of the sentence
Of fate on a soul that has sinned,
Does she dream of return or repentance,
Or tremble at touch of the wind.
Nigh stunned by the storm of its hisses,
Nigh blinded by rush of the rain,
She greets with her tears and her kisses
Her true-love again.

And fast are their fervent embraces,
As they stand 'neath the pitiless skies ;
And bright is the love in their faces,
And steadfast the light in their eyes.
Nought now shall these lovers dis sever,
Though with storm and with sea they must cope,
If help be in ardent endeavour,
In fearlessness hope.

For 'spite of the wild fierce weather,
And 'spite of the loud waves' roar,
They twain looking Westward together
Push off from the perilous shore.
Though nor rudder nor oarage are idle
In the roll of the reflux wave,
Will they gain from the fates for their bridal
A home or a grave ?

Right bravely they push to the Westward,
Right glad of the rush of the air,
As a dove on the wing sweeps nestward,
Scarce 'scaped from the fowler's snare.

Nought reck they if weary and breathless
And faint o'er the billows they ride,
For they know that their love must be deathless,
Whate'er may betide.

And they drift o'er the hills and the hollows ;
But fast over hollow and hill
In its fury the strong storm follows,
A destroyer intent upon ill.
And the heights of the fort storm-shaken
With its towers are shut from their sight,
For their bark is entrapped and o'ertaken
In toils of the night.

Stern stands the dim fort in its sadness
Enthroned above moorland and lawn,
Till the might of the storm and its madness
Die out at the coming of dawn.
For the wings of the wind may not slacken
Till darkness be over and done,
And furze-bush and heather and bracken
Grow bright in the sun.

But though bright be the brake and the heather,
And over and done with the rain,
And the face of the bright glad weather
Enlightened with laughter again ;
Though sunshine the moorland is kissing,
The fort of its woe is aware,
And a sigh for the maid that is missing
Is heard in the air.

And ever in strange sweet fashion
 There creep o'er the shuddering seas
Lamentation and voiceless compassion
 In the voice of the far faint breeze.
As out of the West o'er the boundless
 Sea-spaces its breath goes by,
Its whispers are saddened and soundless
 Of aught but a sigh.

For never again will the towers
 Grow bright as they brightened of old ;
And ever the buds and the flowers
 Must wither uncared-for and cold.
And never again will the pleasance,
 And the lawn's moss-carpeted floor,
Be bright with the beautiful presence
 That graced them of yore.

And the blossoming branches must perish,
 And fall to the pruner's knife ;
There is none their pale petals to cherish,
 And foster their pure sweet life,
And in vain are the rose-bowers shady,
 The roses refulgent in vain ;
For ne'er in her locks will the Lady
 Entwine them again.

But if o'er the wandering billow
 That Lady in safety has sped,
Or the wild sea-banks be the pillow
 Whereon she has rested her head ;

If locked in the arms of her lover
 Sea-shrouded afar be her form—
There is none can the secret discover,
 But only the storm.

Yet when storm-clouds thunder-bestridden
 From the Westward in hurricane sweep,
Though deeper their secret be hidden
 Than the rocks of the fathomless deep,
To the watcher in fear and in wonder
 There is borne on the billows of air,
'Mid the shock of the strong sea's thunder,
 A wail of despair.

Then surely he learns, as he hearkens,
 What means the lament of the breeze,
When the storm-cloud deepens and darkens
 The horror abroad on the seas ;
And surely he knows by the burden
 Of sorrow that sighs in its breath,
That the sea-bloom they twain for their guerdon
 Have gathered, is Death.

WAGE OF LOVE.

THERE knelt a knight to a lady fair,
And gazed into her eyes :
Alas ! those eyes looked otherwhere,
Nor made in love's glad guise
Mute sweet replies.

He spake his prayer to his lady fair,
And called his saints to aid ;
She turned and looked upon him there,
And low, like one afraid,
This answer made.

“Nay, now, Sir Knight, I cannot say
If love be mine or no ;
Love's hopes in my heart lie whelmed alway
With a weary weight of woe,
Like buds 'neath snow.”

She bowed her body down, and wept
Like one in bitter pain—
“My kinsfolk sheathed their swords and slept ;
The quest gone forth in vain
Comes not again.”

Then stood she up before him there
As straight as poplar tree ;
As wild hedge-roses are, so fair,
And as the sweet saints be,
So pure to see.

She said, " Sir Knight, in dungeon dim
My Sire afar must lie ;
Unseen for evermore of him
The sun makes glad the sky,
The clouds go by.

" Unseen of him the dawn grows bright
Beyond his dungeon bars ;
The interchange of day and night
Unheeded makes and mars
God's crown of stars.

" Unfelt the whispering winds of May
That greet the glad shepherd ;
Unsmelt the sweet untended hay ;
Unmarked the flowers ; unheard
Thrush and blackbird.

" He lies like one that is but dead
Alone in dungeon deep,
While I with fainting heart and head
And hands folded in sleep
Do nought but weep."

Again she bowed her body down ;
Her knight knelt at her knee ;

His was the warrior's stern renown ;
He wept for his pity
Her woe to see.

There knelt he silent for a space,
Nor wist what word to speak ;
Scarce might he look upon her face ;
The tears that washed her cheek
Made his limbs weak.

He said, " Lady," and touched her hand,
" Grant me this only boon,
Then surely through the Paynim land
Loud war's triumphant tune
Shall shake full soon.

" Bid me but right thy father's wrong,
Bid me his foes defy,
Then by God's body, ere it be long,
Shall his gloom-darkened eye
Greet the glad sky.

" Ere it be long, his evil plight
Shall surely bettered be ;
Yea, I will set him in thy sight,
And he shall help the plea
I make to thee."

He looked into her liquid eyes
Past her long lashes brown ;
Fair showed her dainty broideries ;

Like seaweed sloped her gown
Her limbs adown.

She spake not, but most steadfastly
Still held her eyes a-stare,
As though behind him she might see,
Where was but empty air,
Her father there.

A space she stood, like one that dreamed
And scarce was well awake ;
A space like statue carved she seemed ;
No word that either spake
That silence brake.

Then burned her cheek, whose rose had fled ;
“ For his sake thou shalt go ; ”
Right royally she held her head ;
Her voice, that was so low,
Right loud did grow.

“ And thou shalt swear, in toil or teen,
By this my Guardian Saint,
Sweet Cecily, and by Mary, Queen
And Maiden without taint,
Thou wilt not faint,

“ Nor turn thee from the Paynim land,
Until that I shall see
My father stand at thy right hand,
And he shall say to me,
‘ Let this thing be.’ ”

“Soon, Lady, shalt thou see him here ;
Yet what ill hap befell
That friends were far and foemen near ?”
“Small need the tale to tell ;
Thou know’st it well.

“As he rode through the forest dim,
Nor recked of secret snares,
False Paynim hounds laid wait for him,
And caught him unawares—
Christ’s curse be theirs !

“They smote his sword from out his hand—
May God’s hands smite the slaves,
And send strange ruin o’er their land,
Till one vast deluge laves
Their nameless graves.

“They smote his helm from off his head,
And scoffed at his white hair—
God smite the cravens blind and dead,
Who mocked, and did not spare,
At his brows bare.

“They bound his hands behind his back,
And smote him on the face—
O when their coward heartstrings crack,
God give them, of his grace,
Hell’s hottest place.

“They fettered all his limbs, and then
They led him bound away,

And shut him safe from sight of men—
What need I more to say?
‘These things did they.’”

And there was silence. Hardly heard,
A bee buzzed on the pane;
Outside a flute-throated blackbird,
Because there had been rain,
Gave thanks again.

She did not hear the blackbird’s song;
She did not note the bee;
The knight that silent knelt so long
Upon his bended knee
She did not see.

She heard but that she fain would hear,
And ever more and more
War-axes clashing smote her ear,
With all the loud uproar
Of furious war.

She saw but that she fain would see,
Swords flashing in the light;
She saw the host of Paynims flee,
And foremost in the fight
Her chosen knight.

She saw her Sire return to bless
Her love of him, for whom
She fain would face pain and the stress

Of fear and all the gloom
That folds the tomb.

Her bosom 'neath her gown did swell,
Her lips shaped her knight's name,
Her dainty bodice rose and fell,
And in her face was flame
That went and came.

Her knight knelt ever at her knee ;
A soft breeze moved her hair,
That from its bands had floated free ;
He watched its waves most fair
Rippling in air ;

As one who, gazing down below
From moorland bridge in May,
May note the silent to-and-fro
Of long green weeds a-sway
I' the stream alway.

He softly rose, and gazing saw
Where tears had stained her sleeve ;
Pity his voice did break, and awe ;
"Lady, I take my leave ;
Do thou not grieve.

"By Mary Queen of Heaven I swear,
And Maiden without taint,
By the Cross that God's Body bare,
By Cecily the sweet Saint,
I will not faint,

“Nor turn me from the Paynim land,
 Until that thou shalt see
At my right hand thy father stand,
 And he shall say to thee,
 ‘Let this thing be.’

“Yet this one prayer shall still be mine,
 O give me thy good leave,
Bid me for love’s most sacred sign
 On my red banner weave
 Thy tear-stained sleeve.”

Where in her sleeve long grasses green
 Were broïdered on the brown,
And her soft arm from sight did screen,
 She grasped and tore it down
 From off her gown.

Her arm from shoulder down to wrist
 Was all of sleeve bereft.
He saw the silk strands twine and twist
 Where that gold-broïdered weft
 Atwain was cleft.

Then wist he whither winding went
 The little veinlets blue
That nestled ’neath her elbow bent,
 Where the warm blood crept through
 Her heart unto.

The little veins that softly crept
 Beneath her pearly skin

He watched, and wellnigh watching wept,
Where they wound out and in
Their way to win.

His dazzled sight did reel and swim ;
Almost he swooned to see
How God dealt graciously with him,
And wrought that arm that he
Right glad might be.

'Twas not so white as folk may bleach
Fine linen in the sun,
The red that dyes the blossomed peach,
When spring has scarce begun,
Through all did run.

He took the sleeve in his right hand,
And like one who well wist
What thing to do, the braid that spanned
Her dainty-carven wrist
He mutely kist.

Then turned he, and awayward took
Reluctant steps and slow ;
Strange heart-throbs all his pulses shook,
He said, " Lady, I go,"
And no word more.

He took an oath of all his kin
And ten good knights beside,
By God's Body their way to win,

Whate'er might else betide,
To her Sire's side.

They gat them to the Paynim land
All warrior-wise bedight,
They found a frowning fortress manned
By folk of mickle might
Full-armed for fight.

They stormed the fort by sheer assault,
And forth the Paynims drave,
Yet wist not where the dungeon vault
Lurked deep in loathsome cave,
Dark as the grave.

To ruin down in wrath they rent
That fortress stone by stone,
Then found the knight a dim descent,
Where led by wail and groan
He strode alone.

Much prisoners pining there he found
With woe wellnigh distraught,
And far within to the wall fast bound
With shackles subtly wrought,
Him whom he sought.

He led him up the staircase dim,
And looked into his eyne ;
God's sweet fresh air was unto him
Like balm, and like strong wine
God's glad sunshine.

He set him on his own good steed,
And only asked the boon
To walk beside in pilgrim's weed,
Shod all in sandal shoon,
'Neath sun and moon.

He brought him all his foemen past,
And crossed the narrow seas,
And led him to his home at last
High-castled mid tall trees,
That bowed i' the breeze.

The moving breeze their banner fanned,
As they rode up the height ;
The Lady saw her father stand
Beside her own true knight
Unscathed of fight.

Her eye was bright, her heart was glad,
Yet wondered she full sore
That he in pilgrim's weed was clad,
Nor sword nor armour wore
Like conqueror.

She flung her on her father's neck,
And for a little space
She clung, like mariner to wreck,
With face pressed hard to face
In fast embrace.

Then fell she back, and vague alarm
Gathered in her soft eyes ;

Her father looked on her bare arm,
And marked in stern surprise
Its sleeveless guise.

She spake, the red blood dyed her cheek
And fearless straightward brow,
“My Knight went forth my Sire to seek ;
I vowed the Saints a vow
True-kept till now :

“ I vowed upon this arm to wear
No garment 'gainst the cold,
Till once again should high in air
That red banner enfold
Those threads of gold.

“ I see that gold-embroidered sleeve,
I see the banner shine,
Whereon my faithful Knight did weave
Love's gift for seal and sign
That he is mine.

“ Thee has he led from Paynim land
Afar across the sea,
At his right hand I see thee stand,
'Tis thine to say to me.
' Let this thing be.' ”

Her father turned his silvered head,
A cloud was on his brow,
“ Certes, Sir Knight,” he sternly said,

“ ’Twere meet that I and thou
Should sunder now.

“ Much thanks to thy good sword I owe,
Much thanks to all thy men ;
Else were I still deep whelmed in woe,
And pining now as then
In dungeon den.

“ Yet for my child, thou needs must fail
Of favour in her sight ;
Nought shall thy doughty deeds avail,
Her troth she may not plight
To nameless knight.”

Aye looked the Knight i’ the Lady’s eyes
More sweet in weal or woe
Than sunlit lakes or starry skies ;
He said, “ Lady, I go,”
And no word more.

But she, with sudden passion rent
Most marvellous to see,
Her voice afar like clarion sent,
Crying, “ Where thou must be,
I go with thee.

“ What place for him who saved the Sire
Meet as his daughter’s side ?
What nobler lot might she desire
Than still with him to bide,
His chosen bride ? ”

Her father clenched an angry fist,
Deep was the oath he swore ;
He seized her by her little wrist,
By her thin arm and bare,
That was so fair :

He thrust her backwards through the door,
Till all her body slim,
Like reed the wild wind's breath before,
'Neath his fierce eyes and grim
Yielded to him.

Pale and more pale the Lady grew,
Scarce might she stand upright,
One glance of speechless trust she threw
Upon her faithful knight,
Then passed from sight.

The knight on pilgrim's staff did lean,
Where he had leant before ;
Almost he rushed the twain between ;
His limbs, though he forbore,
Trembled right sore.

His Lady's father turned him round,
Coldly his accents fell,
" I thank thee that I am not bound
Fast in yon Paynim's hell ;
Now fare thee well."

Firmly the knight made answer, "Nay,
Of thanks have I small need;
Yet if thy daughter bid me stay,
None other hest I heed,
So God me speed."

But he, "By Mary's sacred Son,
And those Evangels four,
With this one word hast thou undone
The friendship that I bore
To thee before.

And if henceforth we meet, we twain,
In land that calls me Lord,
Thy service thou shalt plead in vain;
Short shrift will I afford,
And hempen cord."

So spake the Sire, and straight the knight
Went without word away,
But with the morrow's morning light
Came in the same array
That self-same way.

And thither daily at the dawn
Hard by the castle gate
He came ere night's dim veils were drawn,
Glad, spite of scorn and hate,
There still to wait.

For it might chance that he should see
His Lady's lily hand
Wave from the battlements, where she,
O'erlooking all the land,
At dawn would stand.

Or when the storm his cloudy flock
Was shepherding with care,
It might be she would send a lock,
Sailing through misty air,
Of long dark hair.

Or it might be, when thick the mist
Enshrouded bower and hall,
Where densest ivy chose to twist,
Sheer o'er the outmost wall
A flower would fall.

Or it might chance there smote his ear,
When winds to sleep had gone,
Athwart the silence sounding clear,
Chanted in angel tone,
Her orison.

But daily when the sun rose high,
And all the green hill-side
Beneath its rays grew dusty-dry,
He left those halls, and hied
Far from his bride.

Yet not unmarked of angry eyes
His way the knight did win ;
His Lady's Sire in cunning wise
Took counsel of his kin
What snare to spin.

They wove a weft of craft and guile,
And lured him to their hall ;
The knight came glad at heart the while,
Careless of ill and all
That might befall.

They seized him sitting at their board
Like welcome guest and kind,
And threatened him with axe and cord,
If hopes his heart enshrined
He not resigned.

Then for that he would not make oath
To heed their hest, they swore
That thenceforth he should plight his troth
To nought but dungeon door
For evermore.

But he in dungeon grew right glad
That, where her feet must go
So near to him, his home he had ;
Though nothing did she know
Of this new woe.

For daily still at dawn she went
Where steep steps upward wound,
Till from the topmost battlement
She scanned the lowland ground
For miles around.

She deemed her faithful knight was dead ;
Nought might she see nor hear,
Till one among her maidens said—
Trembling she came anear,
And spake in fear—

“Nay, nay, thy good knight liveth yet,
But draweth nigh to death ;
On all his limbs are irons set ;
Deep beyond day’s sweet breath
He languisheth.

“Thy father feasting at his side
Seized him right treacherously ;
His hopes have sickened all and died ;
In dungeon he must lie
Till he too die,

“Unless thyself canst find the key,
And ope the iron door,
And bribe the gaolers not to see
Him pass, like Peter, o’er
The dungeon floor.”

Pale grew the Lady and more pale,
She kissed her maiden's mouth ;
Glad was her heart as their's that hail
After long dearth and drouth
Rain from the South.

Pale and more pale the Lady grew
As she looked down the hall ;
She was so lily-white of hue,
Sore feared her maidens all
She needs must fall.

But she stood firm and cried, " Good hap
To thee for this thy tale ;
So may all lies, that tyrants wrap
Round naked truth for veil,
Fall off and fail."

Sedately through the hall she stept,
And lightly reached her room ;
Where falling on her bed she wept,
Till night wrapt all in gloom
Dark as the tomb.

Then stood she up and pressed her hands
Against her forehead high,
And wound and bound the twisted strands
Of hair that still would fly
Unquietly.

Through the dim corridors she went,
Whose arras hung unstirred ;
His head each armoured warder bent,
And hushed his breath and heard
Her whispered word.

Then went she on to doorway dim
Scarce seen amid the gloom,
Where maidens deft with fingers slim
In one long lamp-lit room
Wrought at the loom.

Where maidens fair with fingers deft
Before her own design
Did weave right skilfully the web,
And warp with worsted fine
Of woof entwine.

There where she went with rustling gown
'Mid moving maids a-row,
It seemed as when the stream adown
Past long reeds bending low
A swan doth go.

Well might she trust with secret deep
Her maidens each and all,
The warders stout of moat and keep,
Of corridor and hall
And outmost wall.

And for that there that night was feast
 With wassail and with song,
And merriment for most and least
 With revel loud and long
 For all the throng,

With speed as secret as might be,
 That self-same night she planned
Afar with her true love to flee
 Beyond her father's land,
 And his hard hand.

And when the feast was at its height,
 Her figure fair and slim,
Wrapt in the sable folds of night,
 Crept down the staircase dim
 From them to him.

Her fingers tightly clasped a key ;
 She reached the iron door ;
The gaolers swore they did not see
 Her pass, like angel, o'er
 The dungeon floor.

She found her true love far within ;
 In troubled sleep he lay ;
No light to that dark place might win,
 No soul might surely say
 'Twere night or day.

He woke from his unquiet sleep ;
A soft voice stirred the air ;
Unwonted awe his soul did steep,
He saw i' the lantern's glare
His Lady there.

O sweet, when dreams take terror's shape,
To wake from bale to bliss ;
And sweet from dungeon dim to 'scape ;
But sweeter far than this
True love's first kiss.

Him-seemed her form a splendour flung
Through all that evil place ;
She fell into his arms and clung
With face pressed hard to face
In fast embrace.

She said, " O love, forgive, forgive,
That though thou wast so near,
Apart from thee my heart could live,
And seek no shelter here,
Nor on my bier ;

" Alas, I could nor know nor guess."
" Ah, love," he said, " Let be ;
When sailors cease the stars to bless,
When the sun blames the sea,
Will I blame thee."

She said, "Alas, the weary while!
Now make we haste to go;
Me shalt thou teach for many a mile
Thy many deeds to know,
And thy much woe."

"Nay," said he, "let the dead past be"
And oped the iron door;
The gaolers swore they did not see
Him pass, like Peter, o'er
The dungeon floor.

No echo did their voices stir;
They climbed the staircase dim;
It was enough of joy for her
To keep her body slim
So close to him.

They passed anigh the hall, and heard
The festival's uproar;
The warders gazed without a word
To see them cross the floor
O' the corridor.

He set her on her saddled steed,
And little did he say
But "Sweetest heart, have thou good heed,
For rough and long the way
Ere it be day."

She bent her from her palfrey low
Till her face touched his face,
“ Ah, dearest, one thing well I know,
To true love time and space
Ever give place.

“ It matters not if frost be cold,
Or burning sun be hot,
Let each the other's arms enfold,
Come weal, come woe, God wot,
It matters not.

“ I reckon not if the road be rough,
Nor if the way be long ;
One thing we twain know well enough,
While I to thee belong,
Naught can go wrong.”

He sprang to horse, and flank to flank,
And stride for eager stride,
Through mist and dark and vapours dank
Those lovers side by side
Away did ride.

And next day in her father's hall
Was anger and affright,
And much he questioned each and all,
Groom, warder, page and knight,
Of his child's flight.

But though he well believed they feigned,
And vexed his soul full sore,
Her flight a mystery remained
That his cold loveless lore
Might ne'er explore.

DANGER.

I NOT deny thine eyes are clear and blue
As mountain-tarns 'neath cloudless summer skies ;
I not deny thy spirit shines therethrough,
And drowns in light the azure of thine eyes ;
Nor do I make pretence my soul is free
From those strong toils thy strange eyes spread for me.

But well I know thou art as false as fair,
And deeper far than the unsounded sea,
And full as fickle as the restless air,
Born but the bane of loving hearts to be ;
And therefore, since I know thee what thou art,
I sit for ever lonely and apart.

THE STREAM.

FROM the womb of the cloud, overweighted, o'erbowed
By the burden it carries within,
When the roar of the thunder, thereover, thereunder,
And the pangs of its travail begin ;
From amidst the thick gloom that envelops its womb,
And is lit by the lightning's glare,
Through the storm of its strife I am born into life,
And rocked in the cradles of air.
Then my mother the cloud, as she dons the white shroud
That is woven of frost and of snow,
Lets me gently adown by the skirts of her gown,
When it sweeps o'er the mountains below,
Till she flees and goes past, as she leaves me at last
All alone without guidance to go.

Deep under the hills are the founts of my rills,
Where a Naiad weeping sits,
Who was prisoned within for a nameless sin,
When the caverns were carved and the pits ;
And the tear-drop that slips from her eyes to her lips,
And the rain on her urn that alights,
Are transformed in a trice to an archway of ice,
And a frostwork of stalactites.
But the streamlet that swells from the fathomless wells

That she guards in the caves of the earth,
And the waters that run unbeheld of the sun,
Where they know not of drought nor of dearth,
With their musical sound welling up from the ground,
Give me momentarily wondrous new birth.

On the heights of the hills, wheresoe'er the wind wills,
I am fostered by runlets of rain ;
Through the mosses I creep, o'er the ledges I weep,
And the long grass impedes me in vain.
Through the peat that would choke me I silently soak,
Till I lie in the lap of the pond ;
Though it fain would beguile me, I wait but awhile,
Ere I reach the green rushes beyond.
Yet awhile where I lie, the wide vault of the sky,
And the splendour and flame of the sun,
And the stars and the moon, as they follow full soon,
When the glories of daytime are done,
Like new skies 'neath the grass are revealed as I pass,
For with never a ripple I glide,
Till a splash and a whirr, when the birds are a-stir,
And are fain on my bosom to ride,
Set my surface a-jar, and dismantle and mar
All the magic that held me enskied.

Then with lingering feet I forsake my retreat
In the nooks of the mountains high,
Where the hail and the snow in the long long ago
Piled their wastes of white ice to the sky ;
Through the emerald-strewn grass like a sapphire I pass
To the meads where the lambs are at play,

And rejoice when I see them run races with me,
For my heart is as merry as they.
Round the stones at my brink, where the birds rest and
drink,
Such a musical tinkling I keep,
That the lambs one and all think they hear the bells call,
And go skipping away to the sheep ;
Then again for a while, lest they guess at my guile,
I lie hushed like a baby asleep.

Yet away I must go to the fields far below,
And my pathway is rugged and grim,
Rough-hewn in the rock by the earthquake's shock,
When the cliffs were uphurled and a-swim.
With a frenzied uproar down my rock-bestrewn floor
My foam-beflecked wavelets I whirl ;
Sheer over the steep with a desperate leap
All my torrent I helplessly hurl ;
And the wind that goes past flees before me aghast,
As I dash down the headlong descent,
And the branches and trees, that are bowed in the breeze,
By my ruin are riven and rent ;
Yet like hope o'er despair, with my foam in the air
All the hues of the rainbow are blent.

Then I wander again in the lap of the plain,
For my perils are over and done ;
And ample and large, as a polished steel targe,
Is the mirror I show to the sun ;
Till I lurk in a cool deep crystalline pool,
And the weary-foot wayfarer lure

To lave his hot limbs, where my lakelet o'erbrims
 With the wealth will his weariness cure ;
Straight the slim-bodied tern and the shadow-winged hern
 Flee away, and the wary mouse creeps,
And the ousel flits by, and the tit perches nigh,
 And the wise little wagtail's eye peeps,
When his white arms divide the clear depths of my tide,
 As amidmost my waters he leaps.

Wide and wider I grow, as my journey I go,
 And my tribute from water-springs take ;
Like a broad band of blue the green fields threaded through,
 Or the coils of a silvery snake ;
For I bind at my brink all the land in a link
 That is changing, yet ever abides,
Where the water-weeds curl in my pathway of pearl,
 And the lilies lean o'er as it slides.
Where the iris and sedge grow so thick at my edge,
 The reed-warblers have built them a nest ;
Like a blue ray of light in its arrowy flight
 The gay king-fisher skims o'er my breast ;
And the dace and the bream in the nooks of my stream,
 Where hardly the eddies are stirred,
And the otters that swim, blithe of heart, lithe of limb,
 Like strange eels nimble-footed and furred,
Make my heart full and fain to sing o'er and again
 All the songs in my youth that I heard.

Yet as age draweth near, other voices I hear,
 Other sights on my banks I must view ;
For the mill's merry sound, as I turn its wheel round,

And the thrust of the scythe through the dew,
And the plover's sad cry, now afar, now anigh,
And the noise of the nightingale's song,
Must give place to the beat of the myriad feet
That swarm round about me and throng ;
For the factory's hum and the band's busy drum
That is calling its hearers to kill,
And the bells overhead, that would deafen the dead
With their clangour of peace and good will,
Overwhelm, like a dream of loud terror, my stream
In a turmoil that never is still.

But beyond the harsh cries and the woe-begone eyes
Of the mob million-throated and loud,
Past the last iron ridge that they build for a bridge,
And across it unceasingly crowd,
I go calmly again on my march to the main,
Till I feel the vast pulse of the tide,
That each day late and soon 'neath its mistress the moon
Still must follow where'er she may guide.
And the ships with white wings where the merry wind
sings,
As they spread them before him and flee,
And the sea-birds that sail high upborne by the gale,
And sink down with furled wings upon me,
Make me glad by their kiss till I tremble with bliss,
As I mingle at last with the sea.

QUESTIONS.

WHY dost thou bare that forehead to the view
Of all the careless gazers that go by ;
Till each may guess thy deep deep thought therethrough,
And learn what large brain lightens in thine eye ?
Yet plumb they ne'er so deep with lead and line,
'Tis only my thoughts that may fathom thine.

Why dost thou spread thy bright brown hair in skeins
Disparted wide in such a glorious net ;
Wherein fond troops of deep-entangled swains
Have stumbled oft-times and go stumbling yet ?
But dare I mock the prisoned victims ? Nay,
Myself am fettered faster far than they.

Why dost thou ope thy great and liquid eyes
With such wide wealth of wonder on the world ;
Till those blown banners of the storm-swept skies
Unveil no fairer depths when they are furled ?
Yet shine they wider than the world-wide sky,
There is no soul can soften them but I.

Why wilt thou let thy rosy twin sea-shells
Through those thick locks so daintily appear ;
Till every silly swain his tale that tells

Doubts not his love is all they yearn to hear ?
Yet since they heed but mine, what need I care ?
Veil them not 'neath thy bountiful brown hair.

Why dost thou let those dainty fingers lie
 E'en for one moment in a stranger's hand ;
Who fain would hope that he may win thereby
 The sweetest heart that is in all the land ?
Nay, yet small need to murmur or repine ;
No hand may hold thy fingers fast but mine.

Why dost thou dare to walk abroad at noon,
 Nor of the crowd of gazers feel afraid ?
Ah, better 'twere 'neath the cloud-muffled moon
 Unseen to wander in the sheltering shade.
Nay, though thou walk where all that will may see,
Thy wanderings do but lead thee back to me.

Why wilt thou let the red tide flush thy face
 With such rich stain that all who see may swear,
Not knowing what wight is in happy case,
 The signal flame of sacred love is there ?
Nay, let thy cheek flush ; there is naught amiss ;
For none but I may press it with a kiss.

Why wilt thou let thy all too gracious words
 So kindly sound ; till all who hear may vow
That there is no glad choir of singing birds
 Can tune their wild notes sweetlier than thou ?
Nay, dear, how sweet soe'er thine accents be,
Their hidden meaning is for none but me.

How canst thou hope that thy all-glorious head
May 'scape the wounding shafts of the world's spite?
Nay, nay, what do I to be so in dread?
Through love's proof armour malice may not smite.
Naught matters now, let our skies frown or shine;
For thou art ever my love and I thine.

TWAIN.

A ROSY light lay over the land,
Where a man and a maid went hand in hand.

Together they came to the trysting-tree,
And true to each other they swore to be.

Then their paths were sundered, and ill content
To the strife and the snares of the world they went.

And in vain they struggled, and all in vain
Did the rosy light shine over the plain.

For never they came where they stood before,
And their lives were twain for evermore.

And the lightning has blasted the trysting-tree,
That thereunder may no more troth-plights be.

REQUIESCAT.

REST, rest and peace, when all about the house
Naught moves except the wainscot-wandering mouse,
 Rest, rest and peace for one who waited long.
Rest, rest and peace : no slander can he feel ;
Deep waves of silence all his hurts shall heal ;
 Nor foe nor friend may wreak him further wrong.

And where is he who would not save his soul
When all the wheels of battle o'er him roll,
 And crush the suppliants that cringe and kneel ?
Or where is he who would not make an end
Of journeyings where sore the sharp flints rend
 His tender feet, how soft soe'er he steal ?

Nay, this man faced the ravage and the wrong,
And fought the fury of the world o'erlong ;
 Now here at last right restfully he lies :
Nay, this man faced God's foemen all his life,
Nor, sore o'erwearied, slackened in the strife ;
 Now none shall scare the quiet from his eyes.

Nay, let him be ; ye vex him with your words,
The hush of raindrops and the song of birds
 Are sounds most meet to fall upon his ear :

For such as he God's quiet were the best,
Lay, lay him down for evermore to rest
Where none henceforth may tease him with a tear.

Nay, yet ye wrong him; surely he would share
With mortals still the woes that they must bear,
Not shrink to silence e'en though he be dead :
For man right manfully he fought from birth
Till death; then lay him in the kindly earth,
Where men most thickly o'er his grave may tread.

So one day hearkening he may haply know
That woes that were i' the long long time ago
At last, at last shall vex men's souls no more :
One whispered message he may haply hear,
That greed and hate no longer need they fear,
Those old foes that aforetime hurt them sore.

O paltry souls ! what do ye to declare
That he whose heart your joys and sorrows bare
Would gladlier turn him to a dull repose ?
That he whose hand was strongest in the fray
Would gladlier turn to darkness and decay,
And sleep forgetting friends, forgetting foes ?

Rest, rest and peace : yea, surely it were sweet
To see the daisies grow above his feet,
To teach the roses o'er his head to twine ;
To lay him where no ruder note were heard
Than song of sad night's melancholy bird,
In hallowed dust and consecrated shrine.

Rest, rest and peace : nay, surely sweeter far
In fancy still to keep the gates ajar,
 That hold the living sundered from the dead ;
To yield him somewhere resting-place and room,
Where he may lean and listen from the tomb,
 And wellnigh hear who move above his head.

For then, though sadly he must sometimes know
That vanquished friend yields to victorious foe,
 And right by wrong is shamefully o'erthrown,
Yet shall he surely in the lapse of time
See Freedom triumph over tyrant crime,
 And Truth safe-seated on her sacred throne.

Then shall he joy and be exceeding glad,
Whose soul aforetime was in cere-clothes clad,
 Whose heart sat mourning by the grave of Truth ;
Lo, she he wept for is no longer here,
Upsoaring far she rises from her bier,
 Rejoicing in her renovated youth.

Then lay him where the tramp of myriad feet
The old old music daily may repeat,
 That speaks more sweetly to his sleeping soul
Than all your choristers with hymns divine,
And sobs of organ moaning in the shrine,
 And sad-voiced requiems that round it roll.

And in the new world that is yet to be,
When all the wakened land from hill to sea
 Shall put off sorrow and put on delight,

Though lulled to sleep, yet he shall somehow know,
Feeling life's pulses through dead nature glow,
The morning-star at last has slain the night.

Then though his name be utterly forgot,
And his stout-heartedness remembered not,
Nor all his loving-kindness and his worth,
Yet shall his deeds be living and not dead,
And those wise plans that travailed in his head,
And his great thoughts come to a glorious birth.

And he too shall partake of them ; and ye,
Who spend your souls for those ye ne'er shall see,
Shall win rich harvest reaped for your reward,
Seeing that after ye have passed away
Your own deeds still unchangeably shall sway
The woven strands of fate's unfailing cord.

Then lay your lost one in the kindly earth,
Where all things bright and beautiful have birth,
Nor trust to tears to keep his memory green :
He lives again in all that he has done,
Though here no more ye see him. Is the sun
Dead, when dense clouds from sight his splendour
screen ?

GOOD MORNING.

GOOD morning ; yea, if Night can die,
 'Tis surely time she should be dead ;
Good morning ; all the tears are dry
 That Night has shed.

Good morning ; sweet the morn and good,
 Wherein we hold each other's hands ;
Things Night has not yet understood
 Morn understands.

Good morning ; well she knows the while
 That she with Night has naught to do ;
See how her pure sweet sunny smile
 O'erspreads the blue.

Again together we may stray,
 Or 'neath the wild hedge-roses bide ;
Sweet morn will ne'er the nook betray
 Wherein we hide.

O may we soon, my darling, see
 The day that crowns our bliss begun ;
And then shall night and morn to me
 Be all as one.

GOOD NIGHT.

GOOD night, Good night, since dead the day ;
 Good angels guard thy lonely bed ;
Good night ; what else were meet to say,
 Or leave unsaid ?

I know not why good night should seek
 To set our love so far apart ;
'Twere good to lie with cheek to cheek,
 And heart to heart.

Again Good night ; Good night once more,
 Though toll the midnight minster-chimes ;
O let me say it o'er and o'er
 Ten thousand times.

Good night ; I would thou didst not deem
 That lonely nights so good may be ;
Good night ; and if thou needs must dream,
 O dream of me.

IMPATIENCE.

I SAT and waited for my love, and swore
There was no thing so damnèd as a door,
Which when at love's hest it should open wide,
Remains the tighter shut and locked beside.

Then deeming that my heart must surely break,
At last I cried unto the door and spake,
"Whereto art fashioned, O thou thing of sin,
But to let ladies out or lovers in?

"Now may the trunk that gave its planks to thee
Yet spare some timber for his gallows-tree,
Whose sordid soul naught nobler could attain
Than thus to live by building true-love's bane.

"Nay, may that carpenter who planed thy wood,
Since death by hanging is for him too good,
Sawn sheer asunder, flayed and quartered be,
As he hath treated many a taller tree.

"If but a plank of that same tree remain
The wretch with saw hath ruined and with plane,
Let every true man carefully have heed
He trust it not to help him in his need.

“ Should any ship of this wood builded be,
That ship will founder in a dead calm sea ;
Should Yule-tide hearth with this tree’s logs be bright,
In flames that house will fall on Yule-tide night.

“ The very wall whereon thou dost abut
Remaineth less inexorably shut :
Why came that villain carpenter at all
To stop the masons working at the wall ?

“ For else if everywhere the wall alone
With masonry of mortar and of stone
In blank denial had returned my stare,
I should have known no anguish but despair.

“ Then up those naked stones from base to cope
There might no footing have been found for hope ;
Now, O thou thing of promises and lies,
Hope is each moment born, each moment dies.”

Thus, while I waited for my love, I swore
There was no thing so damnèd as her door ;
When all at once, before I was aware,
The door swung back and Paradise was there.

But through its space no dreadful angel came
With angry eyes and two-edged sword of flame ;
Nay, she my soul in worship bows before
Came gliding past the darkness of the door.

Now therefore all my curses I recall,
And keep them for the workers at the wall :
That carpenter who wrought a door so rare
Shall for his craft's sake earn my urgent prayer.

To him wide open, when he comes to die,
I pray the door of Paradise may fly ;
Should Jacob's ladder be the worse for wear,
His be the task to put it in repair.

Then some fine day, so useful he shall be,
That though the Saint still keep the sacred key,
This carpenter by Peter's special grace
Shall earn at last the under-porter's place.

Then naught but praise from all folk shall he win
By letting ladies and their lovers in ;
While they that ne'er have truly loved and well
Shall find no gate unlocked but those of hell.

LOVE'S DAWN.

COME 'out, come out ; the world 's a-blaze
With shafts of light ;
The sun has shot a thousand rays
Sheer through the night ;
Come out, and watch the warfare won
O'er flying night by flaming sun.

Come out, come out ; the world's fair face
Is washed with dew ;
The mists are all dispersed in space ;
The skies are blue ;
Yet there is something wrong with all,
If thou not answer to my call.

Yes, there is something sadly wrong,
Too sad to tell ;
The blackbird has forgot the song
He knows so well ;
The very thrush, whose raptures thrill
Loud triumph in his throat, is still.

But come thou out to greet the morn,
And once again
The blackbird in the snow-white thorn
Flutes his refrain ;
And once again the soul-rapt thrush
Breaks up with shouts of song the hush.

Ah, dearest, what it is to me
Thou canst not know
That I should sometimes looking see
Thy fair face glow,
As if thou didst a little guess
What means this world's strange loveliness.

'Tis Love that thrills the throble's throat,
Whene'er he sings ;
'Tis Love that tunes the blackbird's note ;

'Tis Love that wings
With ardour wild the soaring lark,
That climbs the sky from dawn till dark.

Then come thou out, for Love is near,
Yea, hard at hand ;
Thou wilt not fail to find him, dear,
Where'er thou stand ;
For thou with me, and I with thee,
And Love between the twain will be.

PARTING.

NO, no, be kind ; unsay that dreadful word ;
Or if thy meaning I have all misheard,
Because a whirr of wheels within my head
Blurs and blots out the sense of what is said,
Then say it o'er again,
Nor leave me to my pain ;
But if 'tis true
Thou fain wouldst do
So stern a deed as thrust anew
With sword of speech my body and soul apart,
Be merciful, as beautiful thou art ;
Break now, if break thou must, my all-but-broken heart.

Alas, alas ! what is it thou hast done ?
The fair sweet blossoms open in the sun ;

The lark's shrill throat, that knows not of the wrong,
Is shaken with the tempest of his song ;
 The bee for honeyed store
 Yet roams as heretofore ;
 And all goes well
 In dale and dell,
 As though there were no tale to tell
Of tears and vast illimitable woe,
Like avalanche of ice and stifling snow,
Whelming with weight of worlds two hapless hearts below.

Ay me, we part then, to meet nevermore,
And all the dead days that have gone before
Shall lie forgotten in their deep sad grave,
Nor rouse to grief the joy they could not save
 With ghosts that aye must be
 Laid o'er again till we,
 Whose parting feet
 Ne'er more may meet
 Save only in the midmost street,
Where merest strangers pass each other by
With cold averted gaze or careless eye,
Have buried our dead hopes that none know where they
 lie.

Yet verily since now indeed I know
The fates have sworn that these things shall be so,
Let me this last time hold thee to my heart,
And then shake hands, and kiss once more, and part.
 I give thee back thy vow ;
 Yet well I know that thou,

When all is o'er,
Wilt change once more,
And love me better than before ;
And then though tears may flood my face like rain,
I, though I love thee, counting loss for gain,
Shall feel my heart's devotion half assuage my pain.

ALONE.

I.

ALONE in a land of heat
And stone and desert and sand,
With a hate in my heart of the horrible land,
I long for my love
Till the stars above
Keep a twinkling time to my heart's loud beat,
To show that they understand.

But the case is woefully worse
When the sun climbs up for the fray,
For he aims at my head with ray after ray,
And drags up the pain
From my heart to my brain,
Till I hardly can hope or think, but curse
The heat and the light and the day.

Yet all this weariful while
My heart is happy to know
Her land, the land where her sweet feet go,
In the shade can shun
The terrible sun,
And fold its face for mile upon mile
In a mantle of pure cold snow.

And one of these days, I trust,
I shall flee from this burning hell,
And far over sea, though the surges swell,
I shall find her face
In a secret place,
And forget this desert of blinding dust ;
For all shall again be well.

And my soul shall make oath thenceforth,
As I kiss her musical mouth,
To return nevermore to the dearth and the drouth,
And the deserts of sand,
That deface God's land ;
For sweet and cool is the breath of the North,
And hateful as hell the South.

II.

Alone in a wintry waste
Of icicle, frost and snow,
With the iron earth my feet below,
I turn my eyes
To the iron skies ;

But the skies and the earth alike must taste
The curse they cannot forgo.

But worse are the nights than the days,
When the moon and the stars agree ;
For the moon is as cruel as cruel can be,
And the stars overhead
See the birds drop dead,
And watch with a clear cold pitiless gaze
Where they freeze on the wind-swept tree.

Yet all this weariful while
My heart is happy to know
His land, the land where his strong feet go,
May drink the wine
Of the sweet sunshine,
And bask in the gleam of the bright sky's smile
That knows not of winter or snow.

And one of these days, I feel,
I shall flee from this vast snow-sheet,
And far over sea, though the surges beat,
I shall find his face
In a sunny place,
And forget this horrible land, as I kneel
In the light of the sun at his feet.

And my soul shall make oath thenceforth,
As I kiss the curves of his mouth,
To know no more of the frozen drouth
That weighs like lead
On my heart and my head ;

For icy and stern is the breath of the North,
And sunny and sweet the South.

LOVE'S CURRENT COIN.

WHAT want I with thy gifts of yellow gold,
Thy gems, thy pearls, thy bracelets and thy rings?
Love takes no joy such trinkets to behold,
Nor thanks thee for the revenue of Kings.
O in the record of his treasured store
Such toys as these are catalogued no more.

Bring me the least green leaf on earth that grows,
Bring me a wreath of daisies for a crown,
And these in worth shall so outvalue those
As loads of lead outweigh the thistle-down.
For not by gems is true love bought and sold,
'Tis only pride is glorified by gold.

Then when I greet thee in a gracious mood,
And on thy bosom in a rapture sink,
And give thee kisses for thy daily food,
And tears of loving-kindness for thy drink,
Thou shalt confess, in scorn of kings and thrones,
Kisses and tears outvalue priceless stones.

REVENGE.

THEREFORE on me since thou hast cast this curse,
Than which no soul was weighted e'er with worse,
Since all our lives we twain right well shall know
'Thine is the hand that fashioned all my woe,
 Since naught may now befall
 That might the curse recall,
 Since hope is fled,
 And comfort dead,
 And coming years are dark with dread,
I will forget the happy days of yore,
I will forget the solemn oaths I swore,
And sweets no longer sweet I now will mourn no more.

So with my heart disburdened and at rest,
And thoughts untroubled, as is meet and best,
I pass my soul's resources in review,
And calmly think what cruel hate might do
 To wreak on thee the wrong
 Laid on my life o'erlong,
 And vengeance take
 For lost love's sake,
 And all the pangs of hearts that ache,
Till thou shouldst know indeed what thou hast done,

And learn at last that naught but shame is won,
And veil thy face in vain before the searching sun.

Yea, I have found fit vengeance for thee ; yea,
My soul has sought and found the perfect way ;
What though the long irrevocable years
Were blotted o'er with floods of falling tears ;
 What though those tears were shed
 For blighted hopes, and fed
 From founts of woe
 Dug long ago,
 Now frozen fast 'neath new-fall'n snow ;
Revenge is sweet ; what do I to repine,
When with me Fates and Furies shall combine,
And vengeance sure and sharp and long-drawn-out be
 mine ?

For through long years, howe'er thou may'st repent,
Thou shalt not find my fixed resolve relent ;
Since here I swear that while we twain shall live,
This thine unkindness I will all forgive ;
 And none can say me nay,
 Or take my right away,
 The right that I
 Keep till we die,
 The right no mortal dare deny,
The right I least and last shall e'er forgo,
To pardon, 'spite of all that all men know,
Thee, even thee, my love, that wroughtest this my woe.

THE ORCHARD.

“ Under the blossom that hangs on the bough.”

WHERE blossoms hang so high
Snow-white against the green,
’Tis sweet with thee
’Neath the orchard tree,
Like one that is but dead, to lie
Where the lawn sees naught of the deep blue sky
For the white blossoms between.

But other days will dawn,
And frosts and fears must be,
When the ice-cold breath
Of the freezing death
Shall lie in the lap of the lonely lawn,
And the clinging curtains of mist be drawn
Through the boughs of the naked tree.

Yet why should mortals weep
That blossoms fall and die,
When the self-same pall
Is woven for all
That over the wide earth crawl and creep,
Or swim in the caves of the sunless deep,
Or climb the vaulted sky ?

Nay, naught we'll know of fear
 'Neath blossoms hanging high ;
 Whate'er be told
 Of frost and cold,
Still careless of the changing year
We'll here make oath to live, and here,
 If anywhere, to die.

SHOOTING STARS.

NAY, turn, O turn the splendour of thine eyes
 Upon the cloudless heavens at dead of night ;
What are those stars that shoot athwart the skies
 Only to vanish with their trail of light ?
Ashes of suns that erst have shone sublime
Through cycles of unweariable time.

Then take, O take Occasion by the hand,
 For surely now her aspect is most fair ;
And through the length of all this lovely land
 Our life's sweet pathway still we twain will share.
Let not the lesson of the stars that die
Be all in vain emblazoned o'er the sky.

For how, O how should e'en Love hold his own,
 When all the giant sun-gods of the spheres
At last by endless time have been o'erthrown,

Crumbled to naught by lapse of countless years?
Shall that poor Love be longer-lived than these,
Sailing the vast waves of time's shoreless seas?

Nay, waste your words no longer ; nay, let be ;
Great Love is stronger than a million suns ;
He holds immense eternity in fee,
And takes no heed of time's thin sand that runs.
Though all the weary stars fade from the sky,
Love lives forever throned, and may not die.

NIGHT.

COME, though tear-dimmed thy dewy eyes ;
Lo, day is dead that did thee wrong ;
Unveil again thy starry skies
Deep-drowned in garish light so long.
Unveil again each silver star,
Nor fold about with clouds thy head ;
For day indeed, that did but mar
Thy nightingale's sweet notes, is dead.

Come ; fear not now the flaming sun,
That all too long has scorched the sky ;
His tyrant reign is dead and done ;
Resume of right thy throne on high.

Bind, bind in orange-bloom thy brow,
And crown our blushing love with bliss ;
O give us thy good leave ; till thou
Be near, we are afraid to kiss.

Come swiftly ; all too late the lapse
Of thine inconstant gliding moon :
On earth if aught of evil haps,
It is not in the nights of June.
Come softly ; hold thy healing hands
In deep deep silence o'er my brow ;
No balmy breeze from Southern lands
Is softer-sandalled, Night, than thou.

SIMILIA SIMILIBUS.

I SAW twin tears stand in my darling's eyes,
And dreading sore their dangerous overflow,
I made swift sally and o'erbold surprise,
And kissed away those waterfloods of woe.
Straight each thrice-radiant star
Flamed beacon-wise afar,
Like lights no mortal's might could make, or mend, or
mar.

Yet though thenceforth her starry eyes shone clear,
Such dreadful anger gathered in her frown,

And put my soul and body so in fear,
Mine eyes, once looking, dropped ashamed adown ;
For penance must be done
By all and every one
Whose owlet eyes would fain outstare the angry sun.

But when I looked again, such grace was mine,
Such bounteous pity for my shame was hers,
The frown was gone, the starry eyes did shine
Like lights that greet o'erweary wayfarers ;
And what was done amiss
I found, to crown my bliss,
Could all be throughly healed by one such other kiss.

FAREWELL.

FAREWELL, farewell. And if I speak the word
That most of all I would thou ne'er had'st heard,
And if thou hear'st so desolate a knell
Climbing up sunward from the deeps of hell,
Only reply Farewell.

Farewell, farewell. Can any word to me
Sound half so hateful ? Nay, if aught there be
Of more avail the heart's high hopes to quell
Than all the curses spawned of hideous hell,
It is the word Farewell.

For 'mid foul words through vaulted hell that sound
No fiend a curse more terrible hath found,
No sadder syllables than these that spell
Sentence of woe and doom inexorable
In this one word Farewell.

O let us part with what we may of speed,
And hie us hence ; there surely is no need
The old old story sadly to retell ;
Love's mart is o'er ; there's naught to buy or sell,
Only to say Farewell.

Yea, let us hasten and go quickly hence ;
Small need of nourishing a vain pretence,
When naked truth will all our dreams dispel ;
The pearl is stolen, wherefore keep the shell ?
Speedily say Farewell.

Make haste, make haste ; the sands are sliding fast ;
The time for speech full soon will be o'erpast ;
For proudly though the willing spirit swell,
The flesh, the flesh is weak and may rebel ;
O let us say Farewell.

Alas, alas ! what is 't thou say'st, " Forgive " ?
Mine, mine the fault. Ah, darling, while we live,
Let us make oath, us twain, and keep it well,
Though surge against us all the hosts of hell,
Never to say Farewell.

DOUBTS.

DEAR, I would not have thee say,
Looking through the latticed pane,
“Now my love has gone away
He will never come again,
No, he did not care to stay.”

Ah, my dear, thou canst not know
How great pain it is to see
Through the tears that overflow
Thy white fingers wave to me,
Then to turn my face and go.

Truly 'tis the ancient tale,
Love has caught me in his net,
Trust me, dear, I shall not fail,
When the sun has nearly set,
This thy garden wall to scale.

Art so sure thou dost not feign
When my footfall comes a-near?
Dost thou never, dear, complain?
Sighing secretly to hear
That step on the sward again?

Dost thou never sadly say,
 " All the world for me is dark ;
Were it not the wiser way
 In my coffin stiff and stark
To await the judgment day ? "

Dost not say, " For if I could
 Have the heart to bid him go,
Past a doubt the gain were good,
 Past a doubt 'twere better so ;
Would that he had understood.

" Once I looked into his eyes,
 Saw his faith and love and hope
Clouded by no sad surmise,
 When we cast our horoscope
Underneath the starry skies.

" Naught the stars foretold of wrong,
 Naught of woe to come we felt :
Ah, his love was overstrong ;
 Soul and body seemed to melt
When I listened to him long.

" Scarcely was my soul awake ;
 Troubled echoes 'gan to ring
Through my head with throb and ache ;
 How could I say anything
When he held my hands and spake ?

“Yet indeed I tried to say,
 Were I worthy of his love,
It were very good to stay
 With the stars ablaze above
Holding fast his hand alway.

“What could I have done to show
 That I held my heart aloof?
O how could I wound him so?
 When I put it to the proof,
I could never bid him go.

“So he came as heretofore,
 Since I did not send him hence;
Still he comes, and evermore
 Past all cure of penitence
Will his woe lie at my door.”

Dost thou ne’er in silence think,
 “Might I yet get free from him!”
Dost thou shudder, dear, and shrink,
 Like a bather stripped to swim
Pausing at the river’s brink?

Dearest, if it be that I
 Grasp at gifts beyond my reach,
When I should have passed them by,
 Speak and slay me with thy speech,
I am not afraid to die.

But if doubts that I have seen,
 Reservations in thine eyes,
Hesitations in thy mien,
 Do but hold a half disguise
Over fears they fain would screen,

Fears that I may prove untrue,
 Doubts that vex thee now and then
Lest I should be fickle too,
 Like the many sons of men
Faithless even when they woo,

Then but put me to the test,
 Grant the one thing I will ask,
Let me toil at thy behest,
 Set me some tremendous task,
Make my great love manifest.

What are words but idle breath?
 Ah, how shall I surely know
On my path to dreary death
 If thou love me, dear, or no,
With the love that vanquisheth.

Nay, mere words are none avail—
 Be it pity, be it love,
Thou dost feel; I shall not fail
 Ere the stars come out above,
This thy garden wall to scale.

Then I'll ask thee o'er again,
Thou wilt o'er again reply,
Do thy best to make it plain
'Tis but Love that in thine eye
Shines with light that shall not wane.

Yet if while I mix with men
Naught my doubts can ever clear,
All thy soul shall I see, when
At God's feet I find thee, dear—
Nay, perchance not even then.

LOVE'S REASON.

“Love not me for comely grace.”
Old Madrigal.

NAY, do not love me for my doughty deeds,
Nay, do not love me for my warrior's weeds,
Nor for my form or face,
Nor for my pride of place,
Else one day I might fall from grace,
And penance do in vain, and vainly tell my beads.

Nay, love me but for true love's perfect sake ;
Cast all thy love upon my soul for stake,

As gamblers do with dice,
O'ervaliant in their vice,
Not once alone, nor only twice,
And heal my wounded heart, and help its lonely ache.

If love between us without reason be,
'Tis reason good, for reasonless is he ;
Then let him have his way,
And do not strive or pray ;
With us the knave will surely stay,
Seeing in fate's despite how well we twain agree.

Then since pure love is given on either hand,
The bargain is most righteous and shall stand,
When other loves grow cold,
That are but bound by gold,
And propped with reasons manifold,
For love on reason based is built on shifting sand.

AN APPEAL.

DEAR, I did not know,
When first I swore thy bidding I would do,
That all the world was dark except for you ;
Dear, I cannot go.

Darling, do not say
My punishment must equal my offence,

How could I guess that you would drive me hence?
Darling, let me stay.

Sweetest, how could I
Have caused you pain, had I but understood?
Henceforth indeed, indeed I will be good;
Sweetest, let me try.

Love, unbend thy brow;
Lo, in God's heaven the angry clouds are furled.
Save only this one thing in all the world,
Love, naught matters now.

Dear, the days are dark,
The days are dark with bale where once was bliss;
I do repent me; what was done amiss,
Dear, do thou not mark.

Darling, do not grieve
That evil oft for good is over-strong;
Let me but try to right what has been wrong,
Darling, give me leave.

Sweetest, would'st thou ope,
The least small chink of light on my despair,
Dark though it be, my trouble I could bear;
Sweetest, let me hope.

Love, these things are thus;
Have thou then mercy upon thee and me;
But if from woe the twain thou wilt not free,
Love, God pity us.

MEETING.

THERE came a maiden up the glen,
Her face was fair to see ;
She frowned upon a many men,
But O she smiled on me.

They passed ; she held herself aloof,
And lightly looked them o'er ;
O I have put it to the proof
A many times and more.

And when I met her in the glen,
O which was best to see,
Her frown upon the many men,
Or that sweet smile on me ?

Her brows were dark, her eyes were brown,
Naught might I know the while
If more I loved her for the frown,
Or more for that sweet smile.

I meet the maiden now and then
When all alone is she ;
What care I for those many men ?
Her smile is all for me.

MABELLE.

MABELLE, Mabelle, thy neck is fair and slim ;
No angel eager for his morning hymn
 Upsoaring with God's sunlight on his brow,
No swan new wakened from its reedy lair,
Winging swift way through heights of spacious air,
 Can stretch aloft a shapelier neck than thou.

Mabelle, Mabelle, thy hair is very sweet ;
Its silk strands hold me by my hands and feet ;
 Its strange skeins bind my body and my soul :
In those strong links fain would I ever lie
Bound, though the day be come for me to die,
 Chained, though the sky be folded as a scroll.

Mabelle, Mabelle, thy forehead is most fair ;
What though its height be hidden by thy hair,
 No large-browed wise philosopher of old
Might smooth the furrows wrought by wrinkled time
Back from a brow so graciously sublime
 As that white space thy clustered locks enfold.

Mabelle, Mabelle, thy lips are rosy red,
A little parted by the "Yes" that sped
 Softer than silence past thy pearly teeth,

With so great meaning in its speech for me
Meseemed one scarcely spoken sound might be
Rich with unuttered words that hide beneath.

For then that sweet irrevocable word
Broke up the silence, like a singing bird
That wakes in May a little ere the dawn,
When yet too soon the rapture of its notes
Stirs to glad music all the choral throats,
Though night's dark curtain be but half withdrawn.

Mabelle, Mabelle, ah, wonderfully wise
Must be those thoughts that sparkle in thine eyes,
Whose orbs are twain unfathomable wells :
Sure as love's star foretokeneth the sun,
Sure as sweet tinklings show where streamlets run,
So surely wisdom 'neath thy forehead dwells.

Mabelle, Mabelle, though words are out of place,
And all too weak to glorify thy grace,
Or paint aright the beauty of thy brow,
How shall I silence my still-praising tongue ?
So sweet, so passing sweet, and then so young,
So innocent of the world's wiles art thou.

Mabelle, Mabelle ; nay, I must swiftly cease,
Nor mar the white perfection of thy peace
With false flawed mirrors of distorting words ;
Yet still thy praises, ill rehearsed or well,
Ever to my tranced heart, Mabelle, Mabelle,
Sound sweet as songs of spring's own darling birds.

AGAIN.

SO at the parting of the ways
 I stood, and held thy hand, and spake,
That after days,
 When hearts should ache,
Might ne'er reproach us with the wrong
Of keeping silence overlong.

The summer day was nearly done,
 Thy face was toward the Westward skies,
The setting sun
 Was on thine eyes,
And full on me the moon increased
 Her silver splendours in the East.

I knew the rising sun for me
 Would spread its golden glory soon,
While thou wouldst see
 The setting moon
Sink slowly through the aspen trees
That waved their whiteness in the breeze.

Yet though no twain could take their stand,
 And gaze against each other's face
With hand in hand

A little space,
Yet keep their twofold gaze addressed
One self-same way, or East, or West ;

And though the sun would set full soon,
Nor tarry in the West at all,
And though the moon
Would Westward fall,
And thou in one half heaven wouldst spy
As fair a space of stars as I ;

Yet somehow seemed it in my mind,
Though nothing of our fate we knew,
That we should find,
And finding rue,
In this our sad opposing gaze
An emblem of our parting ways.

We talked our troubles o'er again,
And fain would right whate'er was wrong ;
Alas the pain
That crept along
Our heart-strings like a chord that jarred,
Till all their music quite was marred.

Ah, sadly each let go the hand
That each had sadly held before,
Alone to stand
For evermore,
And each in sadness spake adieu
To true love found no longer true ;

And then with feet that would not rest,
Or ere our bitter tears had ceased,
Thou looking West,
I looking East,
With all our store of sunshine spent
Our several ways we slowly went.

Yet wayfarers who part and go,
For utmost East or Westward bound,
And never know
The world is round,
May meet where ne'er they met before
When half their journey just is o'er.

And either there in that strange place,
'Mid thoughts of peril past and pain,
In close embrace
They clasp again,
Or do but gaze in cold surprise,
And then pass on with alien eyes.

Dear, we like wayfarers, have met,
Shall we, like wayfarers, go by,
Without regret,
With scarce a sigh ;
And once again refuse to know
The love we lost so long ago ?

For now at last again we stand
At that same parting of the ways,
Where hand in hand

In other days,
Before the sun was set, we stood,
And knew not then that love was good.

Long time and lonely we have spent ;
Each moment was a year, it seems ;
Days came and went
Like evil dreams.
Wast thou, when I was far o'er-sea,
The happier, love, for lack of me ?

O let us learn, for love is wise,
And well can teach us what was wrong ;
Lo, in thine eyes,
Dissembled long,
Love shines supreme ; our lips at last
Meet, and we shed our bitter past.

CONTENT.

ERE I was well awake from sleep,
Or knew what pain and sorrow meant,
I roamed about my world in deep
Content.

But when I came to man's estate,
And love's hand smote my eyes across,

At last I learned, though all too late,
My loss.

For years I knew that hope was dead ;
I mourned his death for many years,
And seasoned all my bitter bread
With tears.

I cursed the cruel gods above,
I cursed the weaving hands of fate,
For mingling all the strands of love
With hate.

Yet when I reckoned loss with gain,
And had but learnt that tears are wet,
And all my joys had brought but vain
Regret ;

When youth and love were past and gone,
And all their pains and pleasures spent,
My heart did once again put on
Content.

TO THE OWL.

BIRD of the gloomy light,
Born of the womb of night,
Bird of ill omen to souls that have sinned,
Mice from thee, sore afraid,
Hide, when thy war is made,
Hide when thy wings are spread wide on the wind.

Under the sparkling stars,
Or when mist darkling mars
All the white splendours a-blaze in the sky,
Thou, never tarrying,
Followest harrying
All the small foes of the farm that go by.

Then, like a ghost in air,
When men are most aware,
When men are most of ill spirits in fear,
Thou with thy feathers soft,
Silent as death aloft,
Sailest at twilight the graveyard anear.

Where the dead buried lie,
Screeching to terrify
All the live sinners that wander by night,

Thou, coming swoopingly,
Where the elms droopingly
Weep, fillest all their scared souls with affright.

High in the tower grim
Thy bridal bower dim
Safe in a nook of the wall thou dost keep ;
There on the coping stones,
Where thy mate moping moans,
All the day long thou art snoring in sleep.

Yet when the day is done,
Hidden away the sun,
Through the thick darkness thine orbéd eyes see ;
Then when weird nightmares howl,
Witches and sprites that prowl
Owning their lord do allegiance to thee.

Ah, in the lonely night
If mortals only might
Once their ill conscience to nature's attune,
Then at thy grimly call,
Though the shades dimly fall,
Fearless as thou they would stray 'neath the moon.

Nay, till that day draws nigh,
Ere we our way descry
Clear through the doubts that distress us in vain,
Still we go wandering,
Woes overpondering ;
One day with thee o'er our fears we shall reign.

HAPPINESS.

WHENCE came that sun-bright maiden unto men
Who else were all unblest,
To let them laugh a little now and then
With Happiness for guest ?
Whence won she so great wisdom at her birth
To heal the heart-ache of the hapless earth ?

Her birth is in the deep sea's sunniest smiles,
Her haunt and home are set
In far lone undiscoverable isles,
And ways untrodden yet ;
And all her wealth of favours she confers
Only on those that know not they are hers.

Once ask whence hither she hath found her way,
And whitherward she goes,
And if she hath commission here to stay
Longer than last year's snows,
Quick as that question all her joys have fled,
And Melancholy queens it in her stead.

Implore her yet to visit thee again
And put to flight thy fears,
And she will come in guise of bitter pain

And thought deep drowned in tears :
But if thou ask her those sad tears to dry,
She gets her hence and comes no more anigh.

Nay, do not strive nor cry to her to stay,
But let her have her will,
Then will she bide for ever and a day
Close, close beside thee still :
And only thus her quiet song she sings
That makes men happier far than high-throned kings.

THE WITCHES' TRYST.

O THE joy beyond compare
For the vagrant of the air,
When she travels to the trysting-place of witches.
O the rapture that she feels
From her headpiece to her heels,
When the moonless midnight murkier than pitch is.

See, she sails, for better speed,
On a nightmare good at need ;
Ne'er a steed in earthly stable could be safer.
Her provisions, as she goes,
Are a murdered mortal's nose,
And a stolen slice of consecrated wafer.

Who but she could soar and sail
Through the fury of the gale,
Who but she could laugh at hurricane and thunder ?
Who but she could pierce the cloud
By the whirlwind overbowed,
Big with swords of jagged light that leap thereunder ?

By those lightnings through the dark
Her dim voyage you may mark,
You may track her by her peals of mocking laughter ;
Till the very bats and owls,
Night's own company of fowls,
Though she urge them, are afraid to flutter after.

Hark, the watch-dogs howl and whine,
And the cattle peak and pine,
And the steed within the stable shrinks affrighted ;
From the wheat beneath the flail
To the milk that's in the pail
There is naught but by the taint of her is blighted.

High she rides and naught she cares
For the oath the farmer swears
On the morrow to be even with the witches ;
On the morrow he will lie
Sick abed, and fain to cry
For her mercy on his aches and pains and stitches.

Little recks she as she flies—
Yet what is it she espies,
That she stares across the moorland at the city ?

'Tis a scaffold great and grim,
They are priests that chant the hymn,
They are priests that laugh to scorn the thought of pity.

High she rides, but not so fast
Is she swept adown the blast ;
See, she checks her speed and tugs her rein and tarries.
Do her spirits flag and fail ?
Is her steed of small avail ?
Will it sink beneath the weary weight it carries ?

Nay, the sight it is she sees,
Where by merciless degrees
Is a furnace flame to tenfold fury heated ;
In the centre stands a crone
For her witchcraft to atone,
While the priests give thanks that Satan is defeated.

High she rides, and yet again
In the hurricane and rain,
In the lightning and the thunder she rejoices ;
Fast she mutters spell on spell,
For amid the sounds of hell
She would fain forget the priests' triumphant voices.

Lo, the trysting-place is won—
Who but laggards lose the fun ?
Madly now she rushes headlong to the revel—
On her lips a wicked song—
See, she mingles with the throng
Who have sold their souls and bodies to the devil.

Hark, the cock proclaims the dawn ;
Night's dim veil is half withdrawn ;
O'er her nightmare once again she throws the bridle.
Swiftly flies the monster back
Through the clouds that hide its track,
While its mistress lets nor spur nor lash lie idle.

Yet how fast soe'er she flies,
There's a sadness in her eyes ;
Ne'er again can they forget the taint of trouble ;
Ne'er so merrily for her
Will the spoon the hell-broth stir,
Ne'er so merrily again the cauldron bubble.

Close there clings about her heart
Terror's poison-pointed dart,
When the crone amid the furnace she remembers ;
Crowds of cruel faces come ;
Hark, she hears the hateful hum,
Where they fan to fiercer flame the dying embers.

All too late she wishes now
Her ill deeds to disavow,
And to earn an honest living by her needle ;
For the last end of a witch
Is but drowning in a ditch,
Or but burning at the stake before the beadle.

FAILURE.

FOLD, fold your hands, and lay them in your lap;
What prate ye now of good or evil hap?

Your swords are broken and your deeds are done.
Ope your eyes only to the pale moonbeams,
The time is o'er for all but evil dreams;
Scarf up your eyelids from the scorching sun.

Nay, surely e'en the time for dreams is o'er;
Lo ye where death waits silent at the door
To sift your dust and ashes in his urn;
With all your faults and failures on your head
Ye too shall join the long-forgotten dead,
Ye too shall be forgotten in your turn.

Then fold your hands and shut your tired eyes,
And death shall visit you in friendly guise,
Nor spread his pomp of terrors to your sight;
Fold, fold your hands and lull your hearts to sleep,
Till softly o'er your senses there shall creep
The deep sweet hush of all-embracing night:

“Nay, never think that we will fold our hands ;
Hark, dead folk cry to us from distant lands,

And wherewithal our answer should we make,
If longing still a quiet death to die,
And in your churchyard peacefully to lie,
We feared to front the battle for their sake?

“Darkness and dreams are for the night indeed,
But think ye very night may intercede
To put the dawn back, or to stay the sun ?
Fate in her scales inexorably just
Shall sift our ashes and shall weigh our dust,
But shall not mar the deeds that must be done.

“And what if death stand waiting at the door ?
Shall we less joyfully than heretofore
March forth to meet him, be he near or far ?
Less than the weight of his own bitter breath,
Nay, less than nothing do we value death ;
Death cannot dim the splendour of one star.”

Nay, two stars surely death knows how to dim,
Unless ye carefully have heed of him,
Those bright twin splendours shining 'neath your brow :
Unless life's secret sources ye have found,
Those eager eyes in death's thick darkness drowned
Will shine no more as they are shining now.

“Death is the instrument that soon or late
Will shear the threads were woven by our fate ;
To us 'tis one thing whether late or soon.

Whereto is length of life-days, and what need
That we his threats should hold at all in heed,
Whose fairest favour is a bootless boon ?

“ Life is but measured by the deeds we do,
And not by tale of many days or few
Dogged by dim fears and slow-foot hounds of hell :
For us 'tis well if in the press of foes
Unscathed we earn a glorious repose,
And if we perish it is also well.

“ Naught reck we of disaster or distress,
For what is failure but deferred success ?
And what our faults but errors in our view ?
With all our faults and failures on our head
To one same goal our several paths we tread ;
We may not pause in passing thereunto.

“ Darkness and dreams are for the night-time ; nay,
Doubt not that there are dreamers of the day
With eyes for visions sweeter and more sure
Than those that vex the children of the night ;
Doubt not that splendours shine upon our sight
Whose faintest gleams eternally endure.

“ 'Tis but to turn our faces to the sky,
And lo, the light that ye go blindly by
Makes dark the day-star and makes dim the sun ;
That light shall lead us though the sun wax pale,
Yea, though the keen stars from before it fail,
Till all the deeds that we must do are done.”

THE FINDING OF THE BELLE MAY.

THERE dwelt a maid in a shire of the South,
A maiden whose praise was in all folks' mouth.

Fair was her forehead, and wondrous fair
The unbound locks of her yellow hair.

And the glance of her eyes was soft and kind,
As of one that held sweet thoughts in mind.

Sweet smiled the curve of her lips and chin,
And her teeth set pearl-wise therewithin.

From a hamlet far in the West she came,
And the Hill by the Fount it had to its name.

For she left her home in the West perforce
By the far-famed hills of the great White Horse ;

The great White Horse, that none may ride,
Scored in the long Down's billowy side.

A sweet unrest in her heart was born
As she went through the acres of standing corn.

By lawn and by lane and by woodland way
Her feet fared onward and would not stay.

By hill and by valley, by shine and shade,
Through fell and through forest her way she made.

Two miles from the fair Green Stead in the East
The toil of her travelling footsteps ceased.

And she gave—and vowed no farther to roam—
Her old home's name to her new-found home.

NOW there was a man whose years from his birth
Doubled the tale of the maid's on earth.

For twice so oft had he seen the spring
Draw earth's sweet sap into each green thing ;

And twice so oft had the winter slain
The life that spring would revive again ;

And twice so oft through the sphere of sky
For him had the travelling sun gone by ;

And twice so oft had the twilight dim
Drawn wonderful veils o'er the world for him.

He had loved the maid when her life was new,
And a child in the Westland vale she grew ;

And dearly in sooth he loved her still,
When she dwelt on the brow of the Eastland hill.

Yet naught did he know where her home might be,
Or anear the hills or anigh the sea.

But his hope was high and his heart was fain
To find the maid in the midmost plain.

RUDDY the bright blood shone through his skin,
And ruddy the hair that clothed his chin ;

And the clustered locks that crowned his head
Were a nameless colour 'twixt brown and red.

Long were his limbs, and his stature tall ;
Mid a crowd of his fellows he topped them all.

But Sickness breathed with her ice-cold breath,
And long had he lain nigh-hand unto death.

High-perched on a ridge of the hills he lay,
And took no thought or of night or of day.

Low down in the valley a small stream grew,
And threaded the meads and the thickets through.

From the height of his home so near to the sky
You might see the travelling wains go by.

But though loud were the ways far under the hill,
The place of his dwelling was hushed and still.

Long miles away from the noisy town
He had gotten a homestead 'twixt Down and Down.

For seaward afar by the slow stream's mouth
Stretched half haze-hidden the Downs of the South ;

While the ridge of the Northmost Downs stood up,
And rimmed one half of the sky's wide cup.

And there 'twixt Down and Down did he dwell,
And thought of the maiden he loved so well.

And sore was his longing at dead of the night,
And he longed full sore when the dawn waxed bright.

And sore he longed when the sun rose high,
Nor less when the white moon silvered the sky.

But none of his folk could tidings tell
Of the home of the maiden he loved so well.

TILL at last came a carline little and old,
Who was named by the name of the Yellow Gold.

But soothwise scant was the gold she had,
And sorry the raiment wherein she was clad.

Full fain was she or an alms to gain,
Or a roasted bone she might roast yet again.

From the Hill of the Holy Saint she came
To the stead with Yard of the Vine for name.

To Yard of the Vine she came, and said
"Peace be about the sick man's bed.

“Now tell, has the tale come true to my ear,
That a man who is sorry and sick lies here ?

“That a man, whom his mates the Red Carle call,
Lies helpless here between wall and wall ?

“If this be the Red Carle’s Yard of the Vine,
Much alms for my tidings shall surely be mine.

“I tell ye his sickness will not away
Till again he may speak with the fair Belle May.”

THEN out o’er the gate in the wall did peep
The swain that tended the Red Carle’s sheep.

“Nay, what to my Lord should the old witch say ?
Thou evil old woman, hence and away.”

“Away from thy threshold I will not go,
Ere thou let thy Lord my errand to know.”

THEN he led her under the lintel beam,
Though vain did her tale to the shepherd seem.

And she came to the room where the Red Carle lay;
“Now what dost know of the fair Belle May ?”

“O thou fair Lord with the red-locked head,
Is not my knowledge mine own ?” she said.

“But give me an alms and a cup of thy wine,
And this my knowledge shall also be thine.”

Then loud did his voice ring out in the hall,
“My shepherd shall be thy seneschal.

“Now bring her a cup of the red, red wine,
And a purse of gold that her news may be mine.”

He brought her the wine in an o’er-brimmed cup,
And the carline, whose name was Gold, took it up.

He brought her a purse of the yellow gold,
That her name-sake for once in her hand she might hold.

SWIFTLY she drank the red wine down,
And the gold she hid in her tattered gown.

Then straight to the Red Carle did she say,
“Now what would’st know of the fair Belle May?”

“O thou that are named of the bane of men,
Tell all thou canst,” said the Red Carle then.

SAID the little old crone, “There of late was a feast
Of the folk of the fair Green Stead in the East ;

“And thither I went their mirth to share,
For all were sure of a welcome there.

“From the Hill of the Saint I wended my way,
Where the deer of the Lord of the East Dale lay.

“I saw the herd of the fallow deer,
That looked upon me and did not fear.

“And I came through the heath and the bracken green
To the tallest trees that e’er I had seen.

“The oak and the beech and the elm grew tall,
But twain great fir trees o’ertopped them all.

“And nigh thereunder in that green shade
Alone there was resting a fair-haired maid.”

“O thou slow thing,” said the Red Carle, “Say
Was hers the face of the sweet Belle May?”

BUT wise was the crone, and her words were sly,
“’Tis in telling the tale that the tongue grows dry.

“If one more cup of the wine so red—”
Then round did the Red Carle writhe in his bed ;

And “Woman,” he cried, “take all thou wilt,
Be the red wine drunken or wasted and spilt ;

“This one thing only I bid thee say,
Where, where may I find the fair Belle May?”

THEN the old crone drank of the wine yet again,
And her words waxed dark, and her speech unplain.

“High over the valley, yet not so high,
Does the home of the fair Belle Maiden lie.”

Then as one in pain did the Red Carle twist,
“Say how far hence, if the way thou wist.

“Or art but a lie from head to feet,
And never hast seen the Belle May sweet?”

THEN the silly old crone she spake yet again,
But never a whit was her speech more plain;

“Nigher than far, but farther than nigh,
Does the home of the fair Belle Maiden lie.

“By the Hill of the Saint I rede ye to seek,
And mayhap ye may find her in more than a week.”

Then slowly the little old crone stood up,
And she reached out her hand yet again for the cup.

But the hand-maid came at the Red Carle's call,
And led her away to the gate in the wall.

Where bidding the hand-maid have heed of wine,
She gat her away from Yard of the Vine.

And a prayer from the maid did her name-Saint win,
“Now may Catherine keep me from such-like sin.”

BUT sore did the Red Carle fume and fret,
And longed for the tidings he might not get.

And day-long he tossed till the twilight dim,
And his bed was a bed of thorns for him.

For in vain did his sister Elspeth try
To make the Red Carle quiet lie;

His sister Elspeth, whose words were wise,
With her dark brown hair and her great brown eyes.

She came and stood by his side, and spake,
“Now this thou shalt do for the Belle May’s sake ;

“Tomorn in a wain abroad thou shalt ride,
And I will be with thee and sit by thy side.

“And together, for no man shall say us nay,
We will seek till we find the fair Belle May.”

THEN his woe from the soul of the Red Carle went,
And he lay at rest and was well content.

And Night came out of the Eastland then,
And folded in shadow the ways of men.

BUT tomorn when the stars were waxen dim,
And had fled from the sun’s red-rising rim,

The brown-haired Elspeth rose from her bed,
And called to her hand-maid in haste and said,

“This day must deeds be afoot and astir ;
Call thou to me straight Swain Harbinger.”

Then gladly the strong swain Harbinger heard
The sound of the maid’s swift-summoning word.

And swiftly he came, full fain to learn
How best his Lady’s praise he might earn.

Then the Lady Elspeth spake to the swain,
“Now it needeth thou harness thy Lord’s wide wain.

“On his saddled steed he may not sit,
Nor manage his mare with bridle and bit,

“So sore on his soul doth his sickness lie ;
Yet abroad would he ride ere the sun gets high.

“Now do thou therefore thy surcoat on ;
And the steed that is named of the Baptist John

“Thou shalt harness straight to thy master’s wain,
That at last he may get him abroad again.”

Swain Harbinger greatly rejoiced thereat,
And the steed from out of his stall he gat ;

And he harnessed him straight to his master’s wain,
And came and stood by the gate again.

THEN the Red Carle rose from his bed by the wall,
And his sister led him away to the hall.

And he saw the sun that was growing high,
And he saw the wain that was ready anigh,

And the steed that was named of the Baptist John,
And his heart waxed glad as he looked thereon.

So, holpen of Harbinger, into the wain
Upclimbed he slowly with little pain.

And the Lady Elspeth sat by his side
With the reins in her hand John Baptist to guide.

And he brought them away with his sure-footed trot,
And above them the midsummer sun grew hot.

For haysel already was over and done,
And scarce was the harstling time begun.

And the days were hot and the ways were dry,
For they were amidmost of stern July.

AND they passed the manor-house moss-o'ergrown
With its grey old walls of weather-worn stone,

Grey walls that a wife of the six-wived king
For a dower-house gained with her marriage-ring.

But its walls of stone were as walls of wax
To shield her neck from the headsman's axe.

THEN past the four-went-way they were borne
To the thorpe well-named of the sharp, sharp thorn.

For bitterly there the North-wind blows,
And the bloom drops dead, but the sharp thorn grows.

But now it was dusty and dry and athirst,
O'erparched by the heat like a place accurst.

And on they were borne 'twixt meadow aud mead,
'Twixt blossom of hedge-rose and blossom of weed.

'Twixt the last of the hay and the first of the sheaves,
Where earth for her harvest rejoices and grieves.

'Twixt acre and acre of unreaped corn,
'Twixt scythe and 'twixt sickle away they were borne.

And they saw the reapers that reaped in the wheat,
And the lark sky-soaring the sun to greet.

And they heard the stone to the steel edge set,
As a wight did his sword for the wheat-slaying whet.

And they heard the crake's harsh cry from the ground,
And the old oak's insect-swarming sound.

And they saw the small brown partridges run
From the road where they dusted their wings in the sun.

Till they came to the sacred Cross of the 'Tye,
And their steed kept onward and brought them by.

THEN adown they went by the vale-ward way,
And their thoughts were still with the fair Belle May.

And they came to the meadows that lie right low,
Where the smooth green reeds in the wet grass grow.

And there went in the air the fragrance fine
Of the lush herbs trodden of slow-foot kine,

And the wild mint crushed by the cloven feet;
And they smelt the smell of the meadow-sweet.

Then straight they came to the Mid-vale tide,
And the beams that bridged it from side to side.

And the stout bridge trembled from bank to bank
When ash-wood wheel met oaken plank.

BUT never a whit did the Baptist heed
As he brought them over with sure-foot speed.

And hard was the task that was set him now,
For the hill rose steep ere he gained its brow.

Yet he brought them with never a fear of harm
To the goodly garth of the Grey-stone Farm.

And Elspeth said, as they passed it by,
“To the Hill of the Saint we are drawing anigh.”

Said the Red Carle then, “Saint James be our aid,
And send us a sign of the fair Belle Maid.”

AND they passed the Lord of the East Dale's deer,
That gazed against them withouten fear.

And they found the oak and the elm and the beech,
Tall trees thick-standing each by each.

And they found anear to the North-most wall
The twain great firs that o'ertopped them all.

Then the Red Carle gave to a peasant wight
A guerdon of gold to guide them aright.

And lo, ere long by the side of the way
They were come to the home of the fair Belle May.

DOWN lighted the Lady Elspeth then,
And there came at her call a hand-maiden.

Down lighted the Red Carle with her aid,
And he sat in the porch of the fair Belle Maid.

And the hand-maid told the house-folk all
Of the guest at the entering-in of the hall.

And there was a stir, and the curtains wide
Were swayed and shifted from side to side.

And lo, the lovely Belle May sweet
Came forth her well-beloved to greet.

FAIR was her forehead, and wondrous fair
The unbound locks of her yellow hair.

And the glance of her eyes was soft and kind,
As of one that held sweet thoughts in mind.

Sweet smiled the curve of her lips and chin
And her teeth set pearl-wise therewithin.

And she came and touched the Red Carle's hand,
And close anigh to his knees did stand.

And she bowed her face his face to kiss,
Till his soul was a-dread with exceeding bliss.

For utter joy he might not speak,
His very limbs were waxen weak.

She kissed his brow and whispered "Dear,
How long a time since thou wast near!"

As he felt her gold hair round him fall
There was naught but glory for him in the hall.

NIGH blinded by her golden hair
He might not see her forehead fair.

Nigh swooning 'neath her kisses sweet
He might not stand upon his feet.

Nigh dazed between his hopes and fears
He might not answer but with tears.

SHE spake, "O love, the day has come
That thou hast found me in mine home.

"Sore longed I to seek thee and let thee know,
Yet there was a spell, and I might not go.

"But all ill spells are broken now,
Since found me here in my home hast thou."

Therewith again she kissed his cheek,
And his limbs waxed strong that had waxed so weak.

For broken indeed was the evil spell,
And all his body was hale and well.

THEN blithe and fain on his feet he stood,
And looked in her eyes so kind and good ;

And saw in a mist of glory there
The tangled locks of her unbound hair ;

And saw again that mouth's sweet smile
He had longed for O such a weary while.

And he ringed her about with his strong arms then,
And folded her in from the world of men.

And "Love" he whispered, and "Love" yet again,
And then there was silence betwixt those twain.

BUT his sister Elspeth rejoiced and was glad
When she saw his arms in that gold hair clad.

And into the house they went, they three,
And blithe were the folk that sight to see.

And what things else thereafter befell
Small need it were my tale should tell.

THE LANDSCAPE PAINTER.

(BY HIS DISAPPOINTED RIVAL.)

THAT head-stone ? Yes, it is new—and neglected so soon !

Would you know

Yet more of the tale of the life of the lady that lies below ?

I can tell you ; I once was her friend, and she was a friend
to me ;

Though there she lies in her grave, and I stand here, as
you see.

Oh, yes, you are right, quite right. We might have been
married, we twain,

And have taken our chance together of shadow and sun-
shine and rain.

Well, many things might have been, and are not ; and it
little skills

To brood over vanished hopes, and count them for present
ills.

She lived, you must know, in the valley, and I on the
further slope

Of the mountain that lifts its head to the skies, as if ever
in hope

That the careless clouds that pass, as you see them
passing now,
Will yet take pity and heal the heat of its aching brow.
How oft have I crossed its ridges! There is not a single
stone
In the whole rough length of the path that I have not
noticed and known,
And loved and been glad to greet, as we greet the face of
a friend
Whose welcome is always sure when we reach our
journey's end.

And a welcome was mine in the valley whenever I cared
to come;
And daily I came and went, till the days made up the sum
Of the best bright years of my life, when its skies were
undimmed. Ah me!
About them abode a glory I never again shall see.
For still as I climbed the ridge in the light of the afternoon,
My heart was aglow with the thought, "I shall see my
darling soon."
And late when again I returned, one thought lit all my
night,
"Again on the morrow's eve I shall sun my soul in her
sight."
Strong summer was hot on the hill when I roamed its
ridges across;
But summer died off into autumn, and left no sense of a
loss
In my heart as I came and went, though the wind and
the wintry rain

Stripped all the shivering trees of the pride of their summer
gain.
Nor tarried the autumn longer, but winter wild and
cold,
With dint of his iron heel a-tramp on the frozen wold,
Locked all the runlets fast in the grip of a crystal vice,
And set to the sound of my footfall the ridges a-ringing
with ice.
But little I recked of the rain, and less of the cold and
frost ;
There was that had been mine in the summer that was
not in winter lost—
The passion of ardent love, the glow of a gift divine,
That warmed the veins of my heart with a warmth that
was better than wine.
And winter went by, and was done with, and yielded its
place to the spring,
And again by the stream in the valley I heard the night-
ingale sing ;
And again was the garment of green soft-spread over
herbage and tree ;
But what was the spring's bright robe or the nightingale's
note to me ?
Nay, the nightingale's note and the spring's new raiment
were doubly dear,
And doubly sweet each change that came with the
changing year ;
For ever before me now sweet spring seemed spread in my
view,
And a nightingale sang in my heart the whole black
winter through.

And daily in spring as in winter I came to the cottage
that stood
By the bank of the winding stream where it lost its way
in the wood ;
And daily I saw my love, and at eve of each glad day
We talked long hours together, and ever had much to say
Of our hopes and our fears for the future, and many a care
and doubt,
And many a sage opinion the world could have done
without,
And not been much the loser ; but what to us was the
world ?
Our eyes were undimmed by the dust that the wheels of
its chariot whirled ;
Our hearts were clear of the curse that has clung to its
lips from of old ;
Our hands, though hardened with toil, were clean of the
grime of its gold.

And our talk was of fields and of woods, and of birds
whose nests were begun,
And of all things free that rejoice in the sight of the
strengthening sun ;
And we spoke of the dismal city, and pitied the dwellers
there,
Dim-lighted with gas for its sunshine, and fog for the
fresh free air ;
Foul, murky for miles and miles ; and we talked of the
rich and great,
And the squalid starving poor, whose souls are cankered
with hate,

And their bodies with fever and famine—a horrible festering
sore

That ever from year to year Lord Dives sees at his door,
And heeds not at all its horror, nor hearkens at all to the
cry

That Lazarus million-throated sends up to the pitiless sky,
Knowing well that on earth is no pity, and asking 'twixt
hope and despair,

If haply its home be on high in the vast dim vault of the
air.

And we talked of the homes of the wealthy, and well we
agreed that we

Would still say No to the chance, if ever such chance
should be,

That might, mayhap, enthrone us in one of their high-built
halls,

Where all too thick are the hangings, and all too strong
are the walls,

To let the lament of the poor and the noise of the vulgar
and rude,

On the delicate ears of the owners with hateful insistence
intrude.

No, naught would we have to do with the lordlier lot of
the great,

Not even if we were enriched by the turn of the wheel of
fate.

And then we planned in our wisdom how this and that we
would do,

And much that was wrong should be righted, but little,
alas, we knew

Of the change of heart that comes with the change of rank
and degree
And the hopes whose bloom is blighted. Yet wise in our
way were we ;
For wiser it surely is to take what the fates may send,
Nor overmuch to murmur at ills that we cannot mend,
Though all our hope make ship-wreck, and all its cargo
of bliss
In the shallowing straits of fortune be steered awry and
amiss,
Till it strike on the rocks and sink in the gape of the
swallowing wave.
For caught in the swirl of despair, when hardly his soul
shall he save,
If haply a man remember the joy that comes not again,
The bliss remembered in sorrow is only the keener pain.
Nay, let him a little be happy, nor mar his present mirth
With the woe in the womb of time ere its sorrow be come
to the birth.

But you want to be told my tale, and to get you away
and go
On the road that your own fate leads you, and straight to
forget my woe,
And the dismal sound of my sighs, and the sight of my
woe-begone face,
And to leave this chill churchyard, and pass to a plea-
sant place.
Well, listen again yet awhile ; I will tell you, as best I may,
How the bloom of our life was blighted and snatched by
the fates away.

It was early as yet in the summer, but spring had been
dusty and dry ;
The earth was parched and athirst, and cloudless the broad
blue sky ;
Our hay was housed already—what little there was to get—
Some six weeks sooner than usual ; for springs are windy
and wet,
As a rule, in our upland meadows ; the distance was dim
with haze ;
A spark unstamped would have set our whole hill-side in
a blaze,
So dry was the heather and furze and the long grass grown
to seed,
For all green things were withered, and scarcely a single
weed
Was left for the sheep to nibble that was not as dry as a
stick,
And the blade that grew in the field was as brown as the
hay in the rick.

And still the days grew hotter when June had in drought
gone by,
And had left the crops to cope with the ardours of fierce
July.
Folk said that in town they suffered a nigh unendurable
heat,
And that each rich lord had gone to the cool of his country
seat ;
While as for the toiling poor, why, the poor must always
sweat,

And a few drops less or more make no great matter ; and
yet
'Twas pity to think of them then—all night in the
poisonous gloom
Of the hell they have for home, their single cellar-room,
All day in the crowded workshop with never a breath of
air,
And never a pause or a lull in the din and the toil and the
glare,
Till again the gas re-lighted sent each like a beast to his
den,
For surely such slaves as these are liker to beasts than
men.
And we wished that we two had been rich, for we fain
would have helped them, and fain
By the spell that is wrought with gold would have
lightened the load of their pain.
And we spoke with scorn and contempt of the rich and the
great who fly
From the squalid sight of the toilers who pile their wealth
so high.
And again we longed to be wealthy, if only that we might
save
Some few of the children at least from the great town's
living grave,
For the death-rate there was doubled, men said, because
of the heat,
And we knew that a child must be dying in each foul
pestilent street,
Who might have been saved by the gold, as our hearts
grew hot to think,

That the rich could do naught but squander in folly and
vice and drink.

'Twas thus we talked as we went in the long hot afternoon
To the meadows behind the wood-land ; and still to the
self-same tune

We spoke, and in all were agreed, for our hearts were as
one in twain,

As hand in hand we went through the meadows athirst for
rain—

For the rain that would not come ; and we found that the
beasts had strayed

In search, mayhap, for water or shelter of cool green shade ;
For water was scarce for the herd, though none from the
drought had harm,

So careful and kind was my Annie to each live thing on
the farm.

And we filled the tank with buckets we drew from the
deep-dug well,

And wondering went in search of the herd, nor at all could
we tell

How it was they had strayed, nor whither, for Annie had
fastened the gate

With her own neat hands in the morning ; but now was
her anger great

To find it wide thrown open, the bolt-bar broken in two,
And the cord cut clean asunder by one too dull to undo,
Too rude to respect the knot that her fingers had carefully
tied.

And vainly at first for the culprit we looked, till at last we
espied,

Stretched out full length on the grass and watching the
clouds go by,
A man who seemed by his looks some ten years older
than I.
At his ease in the shade of a tree he was lazily lolling
there
In an idle careless way with an indolent insolent air,
Vacant and lordly, and yet with a kind of delicate grace,
And a look of command in the lines of his aristocratic face.
A broad flat book lay near, and some artists' tools in his
hand,
And surely an artist ne'er need look for a lovelier land,
How far soe'er o'er the world in an alien clime he may
roam,
Than the whole sweet length of the valley that Annie and
I called home.
And surely he might not have found, where'er in the
world he had spied,
A lovelier maiden's face than hers who stood at my side.

But as yet he had made no sketch : he had found him a
shady seat,
And there he lounged at his length, nigh faint with the
fervent heat.
For he looked like one who so deeply had drunk of the
pleasures of life
That little of vigour was left him to cope with the strain
of its strife ;
Whose energies all had ebbed in folly's vain pursuit,
Till its wine was little but lees in place of the grape's rich
fruit.

And Annie would fain have gone by ; but I, like a fool,
must ask
If he knew whose field he was in ; and roundly I took him
to task
For cutting the cord of the gate, and for leaving it open
wide,
Till all the cattle were lost, astray on the wild hill-side.
For more and more it provoked me to see him lounging
there,
With his calm, supercilious, careless, graceful, negligent
air,
While we looked forward to spending the rest of the
summer day
In trying to find the cattle his folly had sent astray.

Well, I was a fool for my pains, as I knew ere long to my
cost,
And yet it was hard to be patient, when there were the
cattle lost ;
And I knew that the flies and the heat might make them
wander for miles,
For out on the open common were no more gates and stiles
To keep them at all in bounds ; and for aught that we
could know,
They might be gone for good, while the man who had let
them go
From mere sheer idle mischief, lay lounging there at our
feet,
And fanning his face with a fern because of the flies and
the heat.

He let me say out my say to the end, but well I could see
He was gazing the while at Annie, nor thought for a
moment of me ;

Then just with the least little trace of a faint satirical
smile,

As of one who will yet make answer, although it is scarce
worth while,

He gracefully, daintily said that he certainly never had
meant

To do any harm, we must kindly acquit him of evil intent ;
And as for the cattle, why, yes, he had seen some beasts
go through,

But they seemed, he thought, by their manner to know
what they had to do,

And the flies were teasing them sadly, he thought it was
just as well

They should try a change of quarters, and how could he
possibly tell

That they were not allowed to go ? he had noticed a look
in their eyes

As though they knew what was best, and certainly fewer
flies

Had been there since the cattle had gone ; but if he had
only known,

He ne'er would have been so careless, and what could he
do to atone ?

This much in excuse he said, and at first seemed trying to
find

A suitable coin in his pocket to gild it, but changed his
mind

As he gazed upon Annie, I saw ; for the delicate roseate
trace
Of a blush fluttered out on her cheeks ; and he kept his
eyes on her face,
Till the dull dead coal of his heart was slowly but surely
lit
By the spark of a smouldering flame devil-brought from
the nethermost pit ;
And his pale lackadaisical face and his lustreless eyes took
fire,
And burned with the passionate heat of the glow of an ill
desire.
Alas, I saw it well, and it made me mad, and I said
I know not what in my anger, but cast loud words at his
head,
Loud words thrown out like curses, instinct with a taunting
scorn,
To sting him out of the mask his manners had ever
worn,
And make him as rude as I ; for the contrast of his
restraint
Still vexed me more than the mischief whereof I had made
complaint.

Yet though I abused him soundly, I utterly failed in this ;
For he did but politely repeat his regret to have been so
remiss ;
Asked how he could best make atonement, and might he
come with us and try
If he could assist in the hunt ; and a twinkle of mirth in
his eye

Showed just what he thought of the errand—a lord on
the hunt for a cow—
But I, seeing clearly the purpose it was not his plan to
avow,
And knowing full well from his face that all he wanted to
see
Was Annie's sweet little self, and neither the cows nor me,
Made answer short and stern that we would not give him
the pain,
Although he had lost our cattle, of trying to find them
again.
And I turned on my heel, and left him : but Annie
followed behind
More slowly and ill at ease, and seemed to be troubled in
mind,
Because I had spoken harshly, and been, as she thought, so
rough
To a man who had done us harm, it was true, but was
ready enough
To do what he could to amend it, and no one could well
do more ;
And it was not right to bear malice ; she never had known
before
That my temper was quite so short, but 'twas well to be
made aware
Of the state of the case henceforward, and she must take
very good care
To study my whims and my humours—and more in the
same light strain,
Half jesting and half in earnest ; but I was scarce in the
vein

For making so light of the matter ; the man's ill eyes as
he gazed
On the eyes of my Annie had hurt me, and I was in secret
amazed
That she had not taken offence, and been angrier yet
than I.
But little she knew of the meaning that might in an ill
look lie,
And how could I tell her my thoughts ? I answered I
know not what ;
I own I was worried and weary and cross and peevish and
hot,
For the hill-side stretched away, and the cattle were not to
be seen,
And the sun had scorched the herbage to every colour but
green,
And we knew not whither to turn, and behind us a-lounge
in the shade
Lay the careless lazy scoundrel who all this mischief had
made,
While far and wide we must wander with eyes and wits
on the stretch,
And he lay idly lolling, or making a scrawl of a sketch.

Alas, I had lost my temper, and felt so jealous as well,
That the earth I had thought pure heaven seemed now
grown liker to hell.
And instead of comforting Annie, I let my tongue run
wild,
Bewailing my own discomfort, as peevish as any child,

And abusing the lazy lord, who, it seemed, had just come
down
To the country for change of air from his palace in
London town,
And was one of the rascally rich who grind the face of
the poor,
And lay on their bowed bent backs great burdens they
will not endure
To touch with their own fair fingers, the fingers they
keep so white,
And nice, and tender, and neat.—'Twas thus I vented my
spite
On the luckless lounging lord, as we climbed the hill in the
heat,
In words that had served before, and will serve again for
the feat
Of abusing behind their backs the lords who are lazy and
rich.
Till Annie was sick of my story, and said that she felt a
stitch
In her side, and was tired of climbing, and she would sit
down, while I
Went just to the top of the ridge, to get a look-out and
spy
If the cattle were hid in the hollow. To go was the least
I could do ;
But I went with no good grace ; and from such slight cause
there grew
A coolness between us twain that we never had known
before:
And still as I climbed the ridge, I wondered more and more

Why Annie had not resented the fellow's insolent stare,
Little knowing 'twas naught but my folly and rude im-
pious air
That seemed to put him in the right who had nothing but
wrong on his side.

Well, I mounted the ridge at last, and by great good for-
tune espied
The cattle, and not far off. And homeward I drove them
in haste ;
And Annie came up to meet me, and praised me, and
thanked me, and graced
Her soft-spoken praises and thanks with a sweet make-
friends-again smile,
Till I well was ashamed of my temper, and said so. But
all the while
That lazy knave had been sitting, and never had stirred
from the spot
Where we found him at first in the shade, for the sun was
scarce less hot,
Though now it was well on its way down the steep sky's
westward slope.
And silently we drew near him again, and I could not but
hope
He would let us pass in silence : but no ; for he gracefully
rose,
Though the smell of the breath of the cattle offended his
Roman nose,
And came with a smile to greet us, and offered to show us
a sketch

He had made on the spur of the moment, he said, though
he felt like a wretch
To have given us all that trouble, but what he could do he
had done,
And would we accept in earnest the thing he had sketched
in fun,
And take his attempt at atonement, and kindly forgive his
offence ?

And I saw that the scoundrel had sketched it on purpose
to have a pretence
For making a present to Annie, but what could I do ? He
came,
And put the thing in her hands, and told her his high-
sounding name,
And asked for the favour of hers, and she told him, and
then for mine
With a gesture of kind condescension to this rude keeper
of kine.
And naught could I do but tell him, and stand, and look
like a fool,
Or a boy new-caught in a theft and catechised gravely in
school,
Or an urchin bewhipped of an usher. And quickly to
Annie I turned,
To hide from his scornful glances the heat on my face that
burned,
And looked at the sketch that was moving her laughter
and winning her praise,
And saw with keen irritation and stupid sense of amaze
My Annie there to the life, enthroned on a rock like a queen,

And a little way off myself—that the man could have been
so mean!—
Like a clod-hopping clumsy clown a-driving a skinny
beast
Toward Annie across the moor; and he might, as I
thought, at least
Have made me a little more like what I was; for the eyes
were a-squint,
And the legs all crooked and curved, and yet there was
clearly a hint
In the face that the mis-shapen booby was meant to be
taken for me.

And still more foolish and hot and angry I felt, to see
That no one could look without laughing at this contempt-
ible scrawl;
And I knew I was made a mock of; and humbled and silly
and small
Was the figure I cut in his sight; for I did not know how
to sketch,
Nor to sit so gracefully idle while other folk hurried to
fetch
Whatever might hap to be missing, nor yet could I drawl
and lisp,
Nor look so much like a doll, nor curl my moustache like
a wisp
Of yellowish hay tight-rolled; and many another thing
I thought of, that he could do and that I could not; and
the sting
Of feeling a helpless fool, and of not knowing what to say,

And of seeing him staring at her, made me urgent to get
her away
Before I had lost control of my ever increasing wrath,
For fear I might do him a mischief. But there he stood
in her path,
And never a jot did he budge, though I said we had work
to do,
And had lost much time already, and lost our tempers too.

At that he laughed, and in anger I turned me away, and
went
On the downward path to the farm ; and my heart was ill
content
To leave him with Annie alone, but I thought she would
follow me straight,
And forgot that we had not fastened the severed cord of
the gate,
The cord he had carelessly cut—I would it had been a
whip,
And that I could have laid it about him, and made my
gentleman skip.

But on I went to the farm, and I gave the beasts their
food,
And waited and fumed and fretted ; and jealous and mean
was the mood
That I greeted her with when she came, for I asked with
an ugly sneer,
How long she had left her beauty, and if I should find him
near

When I went to give him the thrashing the rascal so richly
deserved.

No answer did Annie make, but her delicate lip was curved
In her scorn of my mean ill-temper and jealous pitiful spite,
And she silently went within. But still more vexed at the
slight,

I turned on my heel and departed, and went to my home
o'er the hill ;

And still as I went in my heart there rankled a sore, and
still

I was wroth with my own fool anger. At home I got me
to bed,

And slept not a wink till dawn ; and rose with an aching
head,

And did what I had to do in an aimless stupid way,
And crossed the hill again in the hot afternoon of the day.

Then in sooth, as I plodded along, I made up my mag-
nanimous mind

To forget and forgive what was past, and be happy.
But whom should I find

In the garden behind the farm, where none but Annie
and I

Were wont to wander at will unseen of the passers-by,
Safe-seated there on the lawn, a self-satisfied smirk on his
face,

With his artists' tools about him, and making a sketch of
the place,

But the rascal whose knack of drawing had made me look
such an ass.

He was making himself at home ; I had hardly room to
pass,
For his traps and his trumpery tools were littered about
on the lawn,
And lots of books full of scraps and sketches and things he
had drawn,
All brought, as it seemed, to be shown to my Annie. But
Annie herself
Was not to be seen ; and I wondered, was I to be put on
the shelf,
And to miss her word of welcome, that brightened the
whole long day,
Lest this new flame should be jealous, nor care near Annie
to stay.

But I loitered about on the lawn, and stood in the fellow's
light,
And did what I could by my presence to vex him for very
spite ;
Till he looked up at last, and spoke—he had only nodded
at first,
But his nod had more of a sting for my pride than if he
had cursed—
And he begged of me, since, as it seemed, I had nothing
better to do
Than to stand in the way of his light, and prevent him
from getting a view,
To go rather more to the left, and stand a bit nearer the
wall,
And then, if I liked the chance, he would give me a place
in the scrawl ;

Ten minutes would do for the study, he would not ask
for more ;
And he thought this sketch would be better than that of
the night before.

I looked in his insolent eyes, and I answered him never a
word,
But turned and went to the door in silence, as though I had
heard
Not a sound of the taunt he had spoken. And there on
the threshold I stood,
And I thought that when God made man, and pronounced
his work to be good,
He could not have meant such creatures as this to disfigure
his earth.
And I looked at him once again, and almost he moved my
mirth,
This puny dainty lordling compared with a proper man,
Though I was not in vein for laughter. But then in my
soul there began
A dreadful doubt to arise if at all it were worth the while
To fly in the face of fortune, that still did nothing but
smile
On all this lounge attempted, and nothing but frown on
me ;
And whether, as all seemed hopeless, it might not better
be
At once and for good to resign this battle as lost, and yield
Its honours to Fortune's darling, and leave him lord of the
field.

And almost I turned me about and departed; but then
there came
The flash of a sudden thought that mine would be all the
blame,
If Annie were wooed by the blackguard, and won, and
ruined, and left,
Of her pure sweet peace of heart and her own fair fame
bereft;
And I thought I at least would warn her, and put her
pride on its guard;
And I suddenly opened the door, and entered. But oh, it
was hard
To be greeted at last by Annie with welcome embarrassed
and cold,
No longer eye to eye and heart to heart as of old.
But I feigned to be glad of the greeting, and not to have
noticed the change,
And I asked her to set me a task, and she said I could help
her arrange
The things in the dairy for churning. I saw with a pang
to my pride,
That she wanted to keep me away from the fool on the
lawn outside;
And I magnified each little thing, as a jealous lover will
do,
Each sign that showed she thought him the better man of
the two.

And I talked at first of the weather, and tried to quiet the
pain

That surged like a sea in my soul, and kept my voice on
the strain ;
But I was not greatly successful, for ere very long the
smart
Of her cold indifferent answers had hurt me so to the heart,
That I saw I must say right out what had to be said, and
take
My chance if Annie would listen at all for our love's sweet
sake,
Or would flare in sudden anger, and bid me be silent and
go ;
For then, though it broke my heart, at least the worst I
should know.

And I told her all that I knew, or all that was fit to be
told,
Of the evil life of the man whose image had taken hold,
As I thought, of the heart of my Annie ; and how I had
heard men speak
Of the girls he had ruined already ; and more than the
days in a week
Was the number of those whose names I had certainly
heard them say ;
For too well known was the name he had told us yesterday.

At that she looked up quickly, and said I had made a
mistake,
And she hoped I would contradict it, if only for truth's
own sake ;
He had told her that very morning when first he came to
the house,

He was only a landscape painter, as poor as a starved
church mouse,
Though the name of a man who was richer than any man
ought to be
Was a name that was also his ; and she hoped that now I
should see
How wicked and mean it was to slander a man's fair fame
Because I had happened to hear ill tales of another man's
name—
Such tales ! she would not listen to anything more of the
kind,
Then I, in my utter amazement that she should have been
so blind,
Burst out, "The infamous liar ! and does he dare to deny
That the blackguard and he are the same ? His heart is
as black as his lie,
And his lie is as foul as his heart, and both are fathered
in hell,
And will go to their own place soon, as the devil knows
full well."

And more I may haply have said that I do not remember
now ;
But Annie turned her about with a frown on her beautiful
brow,
And bade me begone from the house, since I knew not how
to behave
As I ought when I stood in her presence, and could but
rant and rave
In words that it hurt her to hear—and she would not listen
to more.

With pain that tugged at my heart-strings I turned and
went to the door,
Looked back but once, and departed, and crossed the brow
of the hill,
And came to the house where I lived, where in sooth I am
living still.

Well, years have gone by since then, and much has
happened, and I

Stand here, as you see, by her grave. But what of the
lord? I will try

To give you the rest of the story. There is not much to
be said,

Except that Annie, my darling, was once alive, and is
dead.

It seems he was jaded with pleasure, and after an ill-spent
life,

Being weary of riotous living, determined to find him a
wife,

And cast his insolent eyes upon Annie; and half in jest,
And half with an earnest purpose to put her heart to the
test,

And win her unhelped by his title, he told her a pack of
lies,

And meant, when at last he had won her, to give her a
grand surprise

By changing her landscape painter again to a high-born
peer.

I cannot tell if she loved him, or why she consented. I
fear

She was tired of life at the farm, and wanted to see the
world,
And to flit to a brighter abode, like a moth when its wings
are unfurled;
For the long, long lane of routine with never a turn or a
bend,
Stretched out to her uttermost view, and beyond, and had
no end;
And life with a landscape painter could hardly be other
than sweet.
And so she was ready to listen; and often they used to meet,
And walk in the lanes and fields and the pleasant paths
of the wood,
Till the day was fixed for the marriage. But when it was
all made good
Down here at the village church, and she was his wedded
wife,
He told her at last to her terror a truer tale of his life,
And decked her name with his title, and thought it would
make her glad,
And took her with him to London; and there she was
richly clad,
And there she lived in splendour, and took, like a queen,
her place,
And moved amid high-born ladies; and ever her simple
grace
Made all that talked with her count her for happy. But
none the less
Her life that seemed so bright had its secret bitterness,
That none but her own heart knew. And none the less
did the earl

Find out he had made a mistake when he married a village
girl,
Who was all too meek for his grandeur, and all too pure
for his taste ;
And at leisure did he repent of the marriage he made in
haste ;
For he saw that she had no heart to confront the world as
his wife,
And was frightened and shocked by the splendour of his
luxurious life.

As the fox-glove high in the hedge is shamed and put to
scorn
By the banner of blood-bright poppies ablaze in the
standing corn ;
As the pale-petalled golden-cupped weed, 'mid the tangle
of tendrils it weaves,
Dies down in the lordlier light of the lily a-lounge on its
leaves ;
As pales the morning star in the beams of the rising sun,
So paled and shrank and dwindled the maiden whose hand
he had won.
There is not much more I can tell, for how could I any-
wise know
Of the sorrow she suffered at heart and the little-availing
woe ?
But three sad years she spent in the shade of his high-built
halls,
Then went, as we all must go when the voice is Death's
that calls.

But she bore two children before she died. Yes, they are
 alive,
And happy, I hope ; if a plant like happiness e'er can thrive
With luxury choking its life, and the weeds of enormous
 wealth
With their rank growth tainting the air till it hardly can
 grow by stealth.
And Annie is buried here, and the grass grows over her
 grave,
And the poppies are bright in the sun ; but the lilies are
 taller, and wave
Their pure white petals above them, the lilies I planted
 myself.
And there at my home on the hill there stands alone on the
 shelf
A book that she gave me once, and her dear name written
 within.

And here in this troublesome world with its turmoil and
 sorrow and sin,
Two things in my cold heart yet set its sweet dead dreams
 astir,
The book that she gave to me, and the flowers I have
 given to her.



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